FEBRUARY 1st ISSUE, 1929
VOL. LXIX No. 4 W

ADVENTURE

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Adventure

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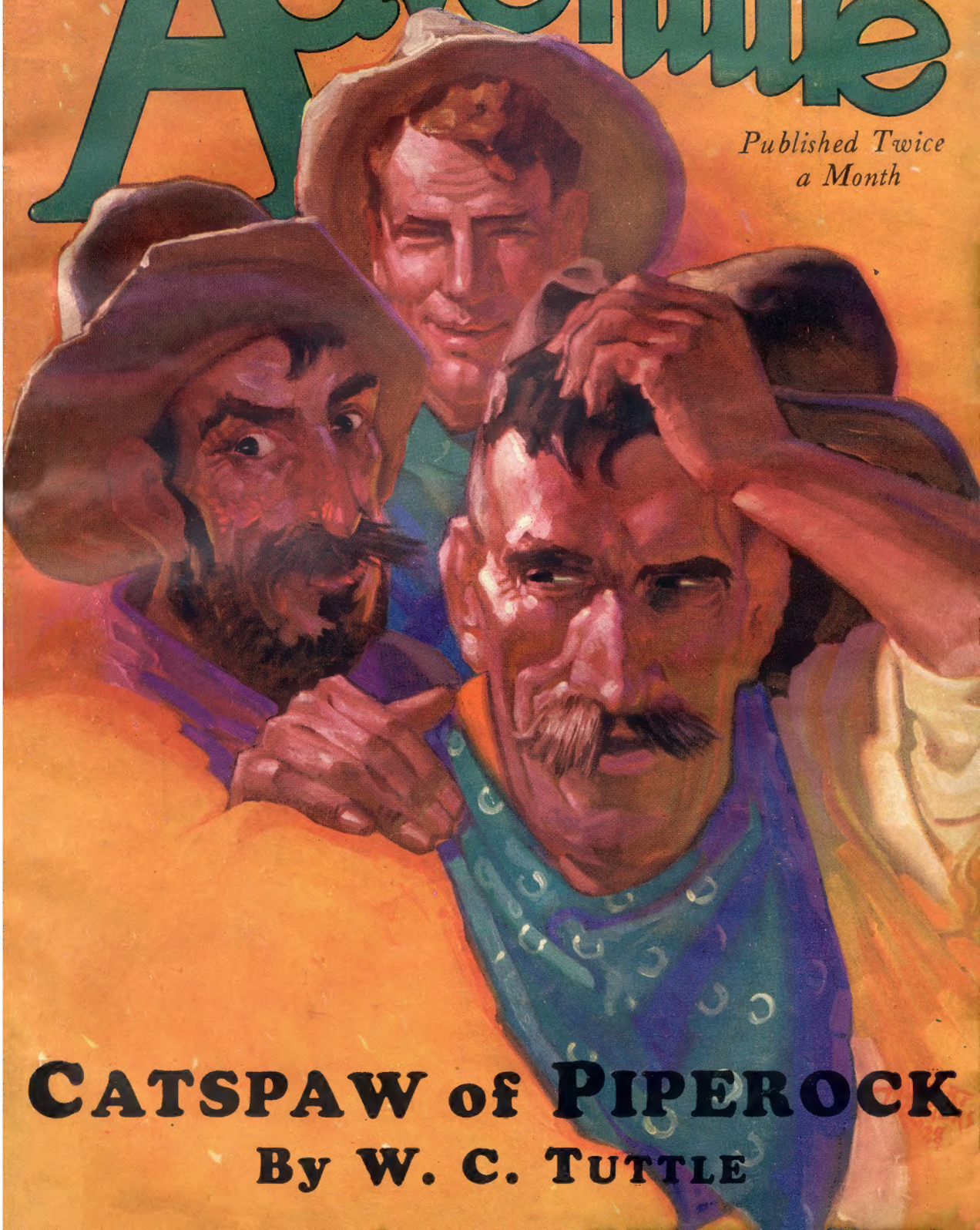

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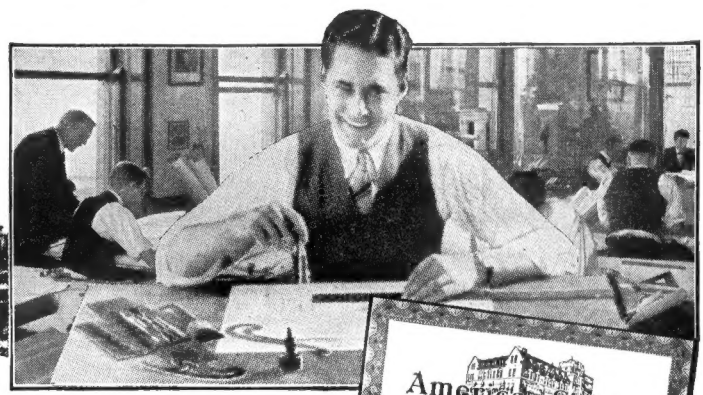

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ADVENTURE Feb. 1st, 1929

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Volume 69
Number 4

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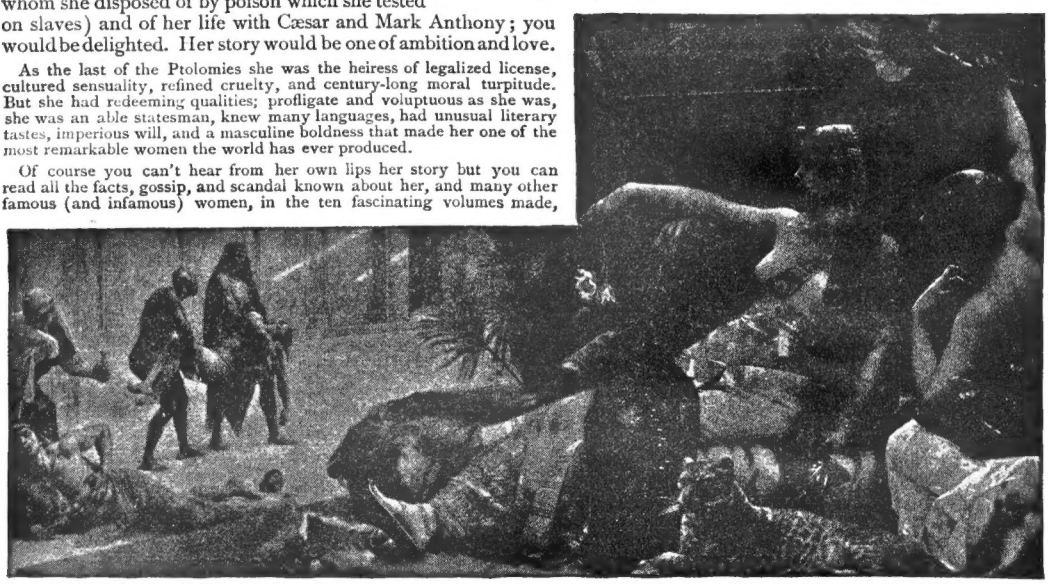

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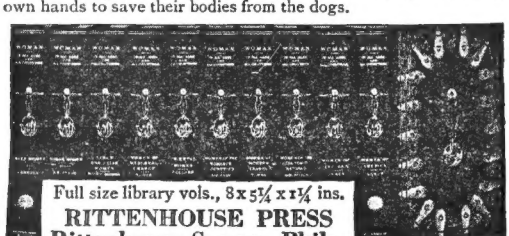

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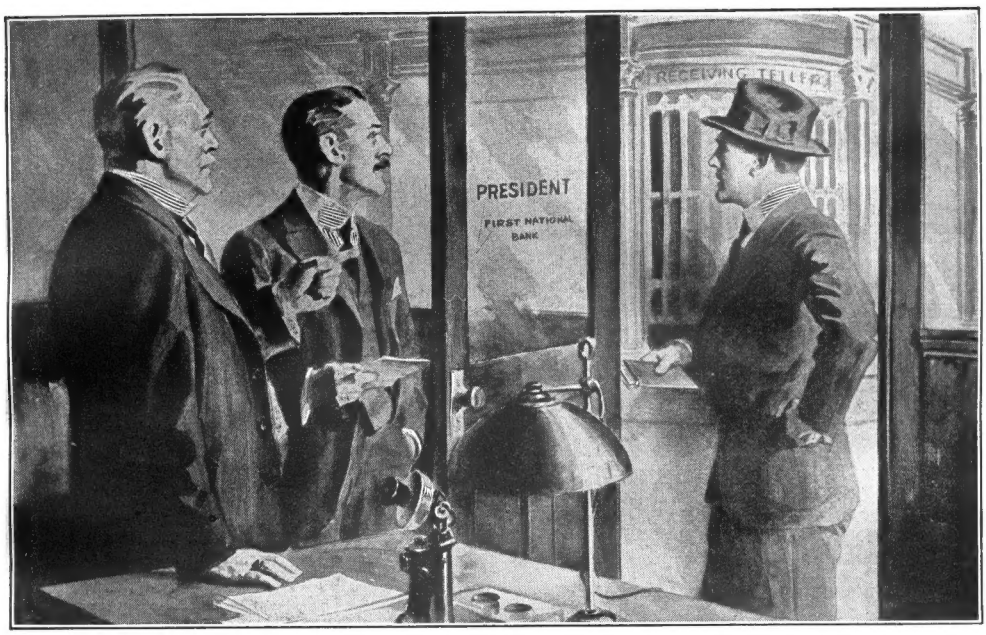

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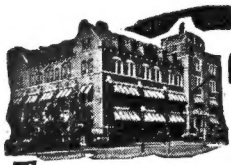

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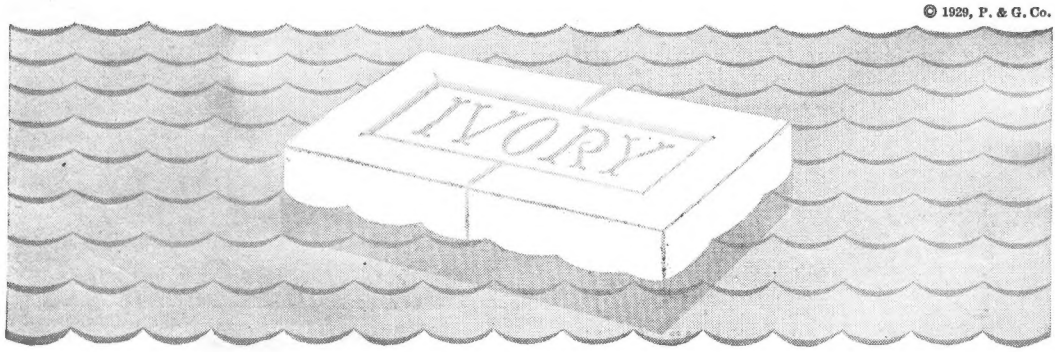

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Another Brilliant Story of the French

An Enemy of Society

BILL MASON drifted into the French Foreign Legion as a direct result of certain violent incidents which had to do with a girl and another man and some cops. He shot the other man and winged a couple of policemen. After that he skipped out of the country, but the European forces of law and order made things so unpleasant for him that when he heard about the Legion he made a bee-line for the nearest recruiting office.

The Legion took him, tactfully refraining from asking any questions which might have embarrassed him, and shipped him down to Fort St. Jean at Marseilles along with a batch of two dozen of the worst looking ruffians he had ever had the pleasure of associating with. Some came from Bremen and others from Moscow,

Foreign Legion by J. D. NEWSOM

but they were uniformly disreputable. The party was marched to the station by a squad of *gendarmes*, and Mason noted with quiet satisfaction that they showed no signs of wanting to arrest him.

He did not give a whoop what his ultimate fate might be; anything was better than having to go back to America with a pair of handcuffs on his wrists. He celebrated the occasion by spending his last sou on gallons of red wine. All the way from Paris to Marseilles he bought liquid refreshments for the gang packed in like sardines in a third-class compartment. At Dijon they were in an uproar; at Lyons they were terrorizing the travelers in neighboring compartments; at Avignon they tore up the wooden seats and hurled them playfully at the railroad officials along the way; and when they reached Marseilles they were so mellow that they had to be kicked out on to the platform. Mason did not mind being kicked. In fact he enjoyed the sensation, for every kick helped to remind him that the long game of hide-and-seek was over at last, and that ahead of him lay a new life in a new world where wine was cheap, and strange women were said to be plentiful.

FORT ST. JEAN, which is the clearing house for all troops bound for Africa, is a large, gray, dilapidated building dating back to the days of the Knights Templar. It is an interesting example of medieval military architecture, but nothing else can be said in its favor. Its walls, woodwork and bedding are alive with a thousand generations of hungry vermin, and its sanitary arrangements are primitive. Cooped up inside these somber walls are to be found samples of every regiment in the French Colonial Army: Zouaves in vast khaki trousers, yellow Annamites in horizon blue, Chasseurs d'Afrique draped in blood red cloaks, coal black Senegalese, brown Algerian Tirailleurs, and gunners and signalers and ambulance men, not to mention down-at-heel civilians on their way to the Foreign Legion depot at Sidi bel Abbes.

Discipline is slack, the food is no better than it should be, and at the canteen there is a never ending demand for the ripe, red, cheap Algerian wine which makes the recruit forget his homesickness, and cheers the old-timer on his way.

In this bear-garden atmosphere Mason felt perfectly at ease. He recovered his appetite just in time to scramble with several hundred other men at the cookhouse door for a mugful of so called stew and a hunk of bread. He wolfed it down before it could be snatched out of his hands and rushed back for a second helping.

"You," snarled the cook, "species of a camel, I have seen you before."

"Positively," agreed Mason in his appalling French. "Once seen never forgotten—that's me. How about another dose, Monsieur the Cook?"

The line of hungry men surged forward on his heels, but he refused to give way.

"Meet me at the canteen," he urged. "It will be my pleasure to buy you a spot of something good."

A ladle full of *rata* slopped into his tin can.

"Stand to one side for a moment," ordered the cook. "Give the other *cretins* a chance."

Scenting the possibility of a few choice morsels coming his way, Mason did as he was told.

"*Dis donc*," the cook went on, speaking over his shoulder as he dished out the stew. "Where is it that you come from?"

"New York—the city of sky scratchers, as you perhaps know. I could do with another hunk of cow. Have you a bit to spare? I'll make it a whole liter of wine if you can dig up a real piece of meat."

"Imbecile, learn that you are now in the army," snorted the cook, wiping a greasy forearm across his glistening face. "It is not every day you will sink your teeth into such excellent *rata*. I thought you were an American—you have the foolish manners of your compatriots. A third helping he demands! But that is nothing. What I desire to say is this: There is another American here. A recruit also for the Legion."

"That's good to know!" cried Mason. "It will certainly be pleasant to speak my own tongue again. Where is he, this compatriot of mine?"

"You will find him up on the ramparts. A strange man. He stands there by himself, staring down at the harbor. A most gloomy man, let me tell you, who reminds me of nothing so much as a Protestant clergyman."

"He is not of a convivial nature?"

"Him? *Ah, lala!* He has been here five days, and not a word has he spoken. He buys his own food at the store, and will not touch the rations."

Mason looked dubious.

"You are sure he is an American?"

"That is what they say at the office. Haywood is his name. Thomas Haywood—what a name, eh? A jaw cracking mouthful of a name!"

"He needs a word of cheer perhaps," Mason decided. "I shall bring him around to the canteen later on."

The cook laughed heartily.

"Go ahead," he advised. "If you succeed, I, Alphonse Brellan, I shall pay for all the wine you can consume."

Mason mopped up the juice in his mess tin with a piece of bread which he shoveled into his mouth.

"A rash promise," he asserted. "Tidy up the kitchen, Alphonse, and proceed without delay to the canteen. We shall be waiting for you, I and this Haywood."

On his way across the courtyard he stopped in at the canteen and drank half a bottle of white wine to wash the stew down his throat. It did not taste quite right, so he had a whole bottle of red, which tasted much better. Thus fortified, he ambled up the stone staircase with only a very slight lurch, and, on the battlements, caught sight of a short thickset man standing with his hands clasped behind his back.

THE MAN, Thomas Haywood, looked surprisingly out of place in that environment. The expression on his weather-beaten countenance was solemn and taciturn. He had slate gray eyes, a tightly closed, determined mouth and a rather weak chin with a dimple in the middle of it. His clothes were spotlessly clean despite the fact that he had been at the fort almost a week. He wore a suit of blue serge, a black derby and stout, square toed boots.

His looks did him no more than justice; he was a God fearing righteous man, and not so long ago he had been first mate of a freighter on the Atlantic run. He had a nice little house in Brooklyn, a plump little wife and two children. But he also had one vice—he drank. Not as other men do, in public with one foot on a brass rail, but secretly, in his cabin, at sea.

And while he loathed himself for doing it he could not break himself of the habit. He had a lively conscience, and he spent hours on his bended knees begging his Maker to help him. His Maker, however, turned a deaf ear to his entreaties and each time he wrested with the demon rum the demon knocked him for a loop. His weakness so disgusted him that he was merciless with other men who suffered from a similar affliction. If there was one thing he could not abide it was the spectacle of a soused sailor; and the more he drank the stricter he became with his crew, with his wife, his children and himself.

Ashore he preached sermons on the evils of hard liquor, but at sea, although he was never wholly drunk, he was never

quite sober. He came on watch just sufficiently intoxicated to be sickeningly aware of the calamities he might cause. And in due course of time his worst fears were realized. In broad daylight, on a clear morning, he ripped the bottom out of the *Carmarthen* on the shoal rocks outside Brest harbor. The ship broke in two and went down in ten fathoms of water. With it went Thomas Haywood's reputation.

He was caught red handed; he had no excuse to offer. Twenty angry men came forward to testify as to his pernicious habits. For once he heard the unvarnished truth about himself. He was accused of intemperance, hypocrisy and brutality. His weakness ceased to be a personal affair between himself and his Maker. His mental anguish, his struggles against temptation were dismissed with contempt. Nobody cared what his principles might be—and prison stared him in the face as he stumbled dazedly out of the office of the *Inscription Maritime* at Brest after the preliminary inquiry.

The whole world was against him, and he felt sure than not even his wife would forgive him when she heard the news. The shock cured him of his vice. More than ever he hated the sight and smell of whisky, but it was too late in the day to make amends. He could not force himself to face the music, and before any steps were taken against him he signed on for five years in the ranks of the Legion.

HIS FIRST contact with military life at Fort St. Jean disgusted him beyond words. It even restored some of his former self-righteousness. Surrounded by troopers who seemed to think of nothing but wine and women, he felt that he had reached purgatory at last.

He did not pay the slightest attention to Mason as the latter weaved a crooked course along the rampart walk. He was staring down at the shipping in the harbor while he told himself for the hundredth time that his fate, ghastly though it might be, was no worse than he deserved.

His sufferings were acute and he did not want to be disturbed by drunken soldiers, but Mason, instead of passing him by, smacked him a resounding blow between the shoulder blades.

More in sorrow than in anger, Haywood turned upon him.

"*Allez!*" he said sharply in his first mate's voice. *Allez* was one of the few French words he knew, so he added "Beat it!" for good measure.

"Welcome to our city!" cried Mason, thumping him again. "The fat hash slinger Alphonse told me you were up here. Haywood, ain't it? By heck, they're in luck to get hold of a pair of genuine Americans. My name's Mason."

Haywood listened to this tirade without any display of enthusiasm.

"You have been drinking," he retorted. "A filthy habit! You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Maybe," agreed Mason, leaning for support on Haywood's arm. "But the point is, I'm not. This ain't no Orphans' outing; this is the Legion. There's some wild guys down below. Come on along and have one on me."

"I don't drink, thank you. And if you're an American I strongly advise you not to make a hog of yourself in front of all these foreigners. You don't need the filthy stuff. It's bad for you. Why, it's dangerous!"

"So's dynamite."

"Don't be a fool. You're a fellow countryman, and what I'm saying is for your own good. Keep yourself clean."

"Say, what in hell's name is it all about?" exclaimed Mason. "Is it a Temperance Reform meeting I've butted in on, or what? I ain't ready to be saved now or any other time. I'm an enemy of society, I am, by heck! Give that bunk the air and act sociable for a while."

"If I am supposed to act like those drink sodden beasts before I can be sociable I'm afraid it can't be done. I've never seen so much depravity in all my life!"

"There you go again!" protested Mason. "Be reasonable. Come on down. Alphonse is waiting at the canteen. He's buying drinks. Good guy, Alphonse. We'll have a couple of bottles of *vin rouge*."

"No," Haywood said firmly. "I shall not go, and for that matter I think you have had more than enough yourself. If you weren't an American I shouldn't give a curse what happened to you, but it's my duty to see that you do not disgrace yourself."

Mason laughed long and loud. Tears rolled down his dirty cheeks.

"Disgrace myself," he repeated. "Well, I'll be darned! What do you think I joined this outfit for, to sing hymns? Boy, we may be dead as cold boiled mutton this time next month. While I'm alive I'm going to have a good time."

"Can't you have a good time without tanking up?"

"It's all the same to me. Sure you won't change your mind and have a small one?"

"Not a drop," Haywood answered sharply.

He laid a heavy hand on Mason's shoulder, and added:

"What's more, I don't think you ought to do so either. Leave the vile stuff alone. Mason, did you say your name was? Let's get acquainted. It's good to talk my own lingo again."

"You're a crazy cuss," confessed Mason. "I can't dope you out at all. Get this straight; I ain't the reforming kind. Nix. Absolutely nix. If you won't come, you won't—and that's all there is to it. I guess I'll be going. The canteen closes at nine, they say—"

Haywood's grip on Mason's shoulder grew tighter.

"It'll kill you," he declared. "Think of what may happen to you if ever you should have to go into action without having taken a stimulant! Your nerves may go to pieces. You may become a coward . . ."

"Gawd! How you can make my flesh creep!" jeered Mason. "We can talk it over some other day. There's lots of time. See you some more."

"No, you are not going," retorted Haywood. "You can hardly stand up. Just pull yourself together and tell yourself you don't need the stuff."

"I'll knock hell out of you in a minute!" snorted Mason. "Let go my arm quick!"

HAYWOOD slowly shook his head from side to side. The look on his face was grim and determined. Mason, he realized, was another black sheep in need of salvation. It was his duty to do all in his power to put the sinner on the uncomfortably narrow road which leads, it is rumored, to redemption; and it gave him a great deal of quiet satisfaction to think that he was making amends thereby for his own misdeeds.

"I want you to listen to me for a minute," he began.

"Yea, I'm listening," agreed Mason, and at the same instant he walloped Haywood in the pit of the stomach.

The blow unfortunately had very little effect upon Haywood's well developed abdominal muscles. He gave a slight grunt and retaliated with a tremendous uppercut which, delivered at close range, lifted Mason off his feet and dropped him in a heap against the breastworks.

"I don't want to hurt you," explained Haywood. "I do not want to fight. Some day you'll thank me for having butted in."

"I will, will I?" sputtered Mason. "I'll show you!"

He went at Haywood with reckless fury, but, before he could land a blow, he ran into something astonishingly hard which mashed his face almost to a pulp. All his teeth were jarred loose and his knees displayed a tendency to wobble in a most disquieting manner. Then Haywood hit him again on the point of the jaw.

When he recovered consciousness he was too dazed to care what became of his earthly shell.

"No harm done, old man," he heard

Haywood saying. "You're all right now. How about it? Still want that drink?"

Mason hiccoughed dismally.

"That's the way to talk," agreed Haywood. "Up you get! We'll walk up and down for a while and talk things over. Say, it's certainly a pleasure to have somebody to talk to again. It's been weeks since I've heard anything but this *parlez-vous* flapdoodle . . ."

And walk up and down they did until tattoo was sounded and the canteen closed its doors. Haywood did all the talking. He spoke earnestly about life and decency and other kindred subjects; and when the time came for them to turn in he helped pull off Mason's clothes.

HAYWOOD meant well, but he was a born reformer. He had had his bad habits scared clean out of him and he wanted other men to share the blessings of temperance. There were times when the old temptation returned—times when he was tormented by an almost intolerable craving for booze, but he resisted the temptation, and it exasperated him beyond words to have to watch his fellow creatures giving way to their immoderate passions without a single qualm of conscience. None of them seemed to care what sins they committed. Indeed they positively gloried in their disgusting vices.

The more he saw of other troopers' behavior the more lenient a view he took of his own failings. After all, he had been the victim of circumstances. He had not been wholly to blame for the loss of the *Carmarthen*. Other people had shielded themselves behind his broad back—the captain and the second officer among others. They had sacrificed him to save their own skins. It was only when he thought of his family that he felt any regrets. Not for his wife—she had always nagged at him—but for his children. He missed them terribly, although he assured himself that their mother was sure to have poisoned their minds.

Before long he was quite convinced that he had been misunderstood and grievously wronged, and he was glad to be away from it all. The one thing which worried him in his new environment was the moral turpitude of the Legionnaires with whom he had to associate. He could not very well reform the entire French army, but he could at least concentrate his efforts upon some small portion thereof, and he concentrated upon Bill Mason.

It was a most unsatisfactory business. Mason positively refused to be reformed. On board the transport he eluded his well-wisher, and when he went ashore at Oran he was so wildly hilarious that the escort sergeant promptly had him locked in the guard room—where he stayed until the draft was sent on to Sidi bel Abbes.

"You see," Haywood pointed out while they were being herded into a cattle car at the station, "you see what you've missed. While you were in the cells under lock and key I've been looking around. Oran's a great place. The view from the old Spanish fortress is wonderful, and the Jew market—I've never seen such meat in my life. You'd think the French would pass a law against that sort of thing."

"You ain't on a sight seeing tour, you poor boob," snarled Mason, who had a ten days' growth of beard on his sunken cheeks, and looked more crapulent than ever. "This is the Foreign Legion. Pretty soon you're going to shed that suit of yours and crawl into a uniform—"

"And so are you. You don't want to disgrace either yourself or your country. Mason, you've got to stop drinking so much, I tell you."

He was being stern and hard, but Mason merely laughed at him.

"You mind your own business," he urged, "and I'll mind mine. I ain't got no country and I'm short of morals. When I want a drink I'll have it. Life's short. Don't preach. Not to me. You slugged me good and plenty, I'll grant you that, but next time I'll know better. Watch out I don't wallop you with something harder'n my mitt next time. There's bayonets waiting for us where we're going, not to mention rifles."

"Don't be absurd; you wouldn't com-

mit murder, and anyway I'm only trying to help you."

"You can stop right there," snarled Mason, and his face, seen in the blue white glare of the arc lamps, was altogether evil. "You wouldn't be the first man I've ever plugged, you big hunk of cheese. That's why I'm here now. And if you come shooting off your mouth too much or too often you'll soon find out where you get off. I'm having a good time, and I mean to go to hell in my own way. Get all that straight?"

Haywood stared at him in horrified amazement.

"You have killed a man!" he whispered.

"Sure, you boob. It was him or me—I let daylight into him. Any objections?"

Haywood forced himself to speak calmly.

"None whatsoever."

Then he turned his back on Mason to hide the look of loathing he could not repress.

At a pinch he could understand and sympathize with good-for-nothing inebriates, but with a murderer he wanted nothing whatsoever to do.

THEREAFTER all intercourse between them ceased. They lived in the same barrack room, they sweated on the same parade ground, they drilled and marched and washed their clothes side by side, but there was no attempt at friendliness.

And while Haywood went up, Mason went down. Haywood was a paragon among Legionnaires. He took his new job seriously. As soon as he mastered enough French to make himself understood he was transferred to the corporal's training squad. He learned the Manual of Infantry Training by heart and was soon promoted to the rank of soldier of the first class. He took to the Legion's iron bound code of discipline as a duck takes to water and asserted his authority with a vigor which earned for him the esteem of his chiefs.

Mason, on the other hand, was neither too good to live nor bad enough to hang. He did what he was told to do, and let it go at that. On pay day he toured the dives of Sidi bel Abbes with other congenial troopers and painted the town red according to the time honored custom of Legionnaires. If the party became uproarious and ended in the guard-room, he accepted the punishment which was subsequently meted out to him as philosophically as possible and forgot all about it as soon as he was released.

In other words he was a normal roughneck Legionnaire, and in all probability he would have come to no great harm if he had not had the bad luck to be transferred to Haywood's squad.

He ran into trouble less than ten minutes after the transfer became official.

"That kit is not properly folded," announced Soldier of the First Class Thomas Haywood, eying the stack of clothing on the shelf above Mason's cot. "Slovenly bit of work. Fix it before you go out on parade."

"What's wrong with it?" protested Mason.

"Ha! Want to be shown, do you? All right: Your No. 1 tunic is not properly creased. Your spare shirts ought to be on top, not under, your clean underwear, and your boots should not stick out over the edge of the shelf . . ."

As he spoke he yanked each article he referred to off the plank and let it drop to the floor. When he was through, Mason's kit looked as though it had been wrecked by a young hurricane.

The other men in the room had followed the incident with detached interest. It was not their funeral. One of two things was bound to happen: If Mason rearranged his belongings at once he was sure to be late for the "fall in" which was due to sound in a couple of minutes; if he left it until afterward he would find himself in an even worse predicament, for room inspection was scheduled to take place at eleven o'clock. He had to lose.

"Now then," snapped Haywood, standing back and hitching his thumbs into his black cummerbund. "Get busy there! Snap into it!"

"Get busy yourself, you crazy mutt!" retorted Mason. "This is where I quit."

"What! You refuse to obey?"

"Sure I do. If you think I can fix that stuff in half a minute—"

"You refuse to obey?" repeated Haywood with icy calm.

"I'm telling you it can't be done!"

"For the third and last time," said Haywood, using the correct formula as laid down by the *règlement.* "Do you refuse to obey a direct order?"

Whereupon Mason picked up one of his campaign boots and hurled it with extreme violence in Haywood's direction. The boot bounced off Haywood's chest and fell to the floor. He stood like a tower of strength in the middle of the room, and his voice was as dispassionate as if he were talking about the weather.

"Mason, you're under arrest!" he announced.

"Fine!" agreed Mason. "That's great—but one of these days you're going to wake up dead."

"I am not afraid of you, my boy, declared Haywood. "I'll do my duty, all my duty, and as long as you belong to my squad I'll make sure you do yours."

Mason spent the next twenty-eight days in a black and steamy cell, where he was a prey to bugs and black thoughts. When he came out Haywood was still placidly determined to make a good soldier out of him.

"Mason," he said, "the time has come for a showdown."

"You'll stop a bullet before you're much older. You're asking for it!"

"Never mind that now. You only did twenty-eight days. I could have had you sent up for a year if I'd told the captain about the way you threatened me. I don't expect you to be grateful, but I want you to understand that I mean business."

"Same here."

"All right then; do your work properly, keep sober and keep clean. That's all I expect of you."

"What you expect and what you'll get are two different things," Mason assured him. "Next time I'll heave a bayonet into you instead of a shoe. Maybe that'll hold you for a while."

HE WAS altogether incurable—at least Haywood thought so, which amounted to the same thing. Nothing he did was ever right. Haywood pestered the life out of him, for his own good, to compel him to overcome his vile habits. For the next few weeks he was in and out of the guardroom with monotonous regularity, and at last he balked.

He had gone downtown one evening to listen to the regimental band. The night was hot and after having wandered about in the crowd around the bandstand he decided that the time had come to blow himself to a drink.

Accordingly he crossed the street and headed toward a sidewalk café, where perfectly respectable shopkeepers and their families were sipping lemonade and iced beer. He was just about to sit down when Haywood barred his way. Earnest, righteous Haywood with his *képi* on absolutely straight, and his white uniform buttoned up to the last button.

"Don't!" he ordered. "Mason, you don't want to go in there. You have been drinking too much lately. I've had my eye on you."

"For the love of Pete!" cried Mason. "What's it to you what I do?"

"I'm not thinking of you; it's the squad I'm worrying about," Haywood retorted with heavy dignity. "You're giving it a bad name. I won't have it. You're asking for trouble, Mason!"

"Look here," Mason said quietly. "I'm thirsty and I mean to have a drink—and you can't stop me. Get out of my way."

Haywood's expression became mulish.

"There's something else I want to mention," he went on. "I've been thinking a good deal about you, Mason. Blood is thicker than water, you know, and I hate to see you going to the dogs like this. Don't drift! Make a fresh start. Pull yourself together. It doesn't matter to me what mistakes you've made. You

can make good in the Legion if you want to. It's not too late yet. In a couple of years you could be a corporal if you would only cut out the booze."

"Ain't that grand!" applauded Mason. "Gwan!" he jeered, "I ain't ready to be saved just yet. You're one classy hot air merchant, I'll say! Blood's thicker than water. Make a fresh start. Pull yourself together! Don't you know any more good gags?" He laughed derisively. "Say, were you drunk or sober when you piled your ship on the rocks?"

All the blood drained out of Haywood's face, and a look of horror crept into his eyes.

"Who—who told you?" he gurgled. "How do you know anything about me? It's a damn' lie. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh, yes you do, sweetie," chuckled Mason. "You know. The *Carmarthen*. 'O Lord,' " he mimicked, " 'have pity upon me. I can't leave the stuff alone. I am weak, O Lord, so weak!' "

Haywood was breathing in short, stabbing gasps as though he had just plunged into ice cold water.

"You devil," he whispered. "How did you find out?"

"You shouldn't talk in your sleep," chuckled Mason. "Rave! Say, I've had an earful. You and your goldarned conscience!"

"Does anybody else know?"

Mason shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? It's not my business to tell 'em. You ain't so hot as a topic of conversation, and it's nothing to me what you've done. Come on, I'm thirsty. If you're a wide open man of the great silent spaces, as they say, you'll have a glass of wine just to show you're not afraid."

"I will not," declared Haywood, licking his dry lips. "It's mighty decent of you not to have told anybody. I'm grateful, and I want to help you. We've both made mistakes, terrible mistakes—"

Mason pushed back his *képi* and mopped his glistening forehead with a red cotton handkerchief. There was a bright twinkle in his eyes as he stared at Haywood's intent, unhumorous face. Grief and remorse had set their heavy marks upon it. Hard work, the sun of Africa and sleepless nights had sweated the fat off his bones and hollowed his cheeks. There were deep wrinkles about the corners of his eyes; his lower lip bulged out as though it were filled with determination. He exuded good intentions at every pore. He looked good and kind and strong, and damnably in earnest.

Mason made a wry face.

"Yep," he admitted. "You been making a whole lot of mistakes lately. That last ten days extra drill for instance, and the seven days detention before that. They was mistakes right enough. Still, you're a queer duck. Let's forget it. Have one on me and let's call it a day."

THE BAND had stopped playing and all about them a perspiring, gabbling crowd was surging toward the cafés lining the square. Garlic scented Spanish farmers, with lumpy wives and innumerable children, jostled staid French shopkeepers, very conscious of their exalted status in the colony. There were Arabs in flowing white *burnous*, and Arabs in tight fitting jackets and immense trousers with seats reaching down to their ankles, and Arabs in lousy rags, and swaggering Legionnaires treading on civilians' heels, especially the heels of the snobbish French shopkeepers, who shielded their reluctant daughters from all contact with the odious foreigners.

There was a great scraping of chairs and tables, and a rattle of glasses. Small native bootblacks, clad in little but their dubious innocence and verminous fezes, fought and screamed for the possession of potential customers.

"I will not," Haywood declared, raising his voice about the clatter. "Come on, old man. Be reasonable. The show's over; let's drift back to barracks. I'd like to lend you my Manual of Infantry Training. I'll be a corporal pretty soon, before the outfit leaves the depot, I

guess, and I'd like to see you take over the squad."

While he talked he hooked his arm through Mason's and tried to drag him along, but he might as well have tried to drag an unwilling elephant.

"I'm going to drift into the Café de Paris," Mason declared. "I'm going to have a glass of *anis*, and after that I'll wander down to the nigger village. That's my program for tonight. Ever been to the nigger village? Slick. It's got Harlem beat by a mile."

And he added a few significant details which made Haywood blush a beautiful strawberry red.

"It's out of bounds," said the soldier of the first class.

"I should worry!" said the soldier of the second class.

"You mean to say you'll go down though it's strictly forbidden?"

"You never can tell!"

"For once I can," snapped Haywood. "There's a general inspection tomorrow, and I don't want any blear eyed boozers spoiling the looks of my squad. You're going back to barracks at once." His voice was hard. "I order you to go back at once!"

"Good night!" answered Mason. "I'll be on my way."

He turned on his heel and headed toward the café, but Haywood caught him by the arm.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" he barked.

"I'm deaf," explained Mason. "People are looking our way, you poor simp. Let go my arm before you start something."

His hand dropped to the hilt of his bayonet.

"Be careful," cautioned Haywood. "I've done my best to save you from your worst enemy—yourself. I'll try no more. Will you or will you not do as I tell you?"

A hundred pairs of eyes were turned in their direction. Nearby civilians, scenting trouble between the two men, were pushing back their chairs to be out of harm's way.

"If you don't stop pawing me," Mason said quietly, "I'm going to put two feet of steel inside your belly. First you slobber, then you bully. Wait till you're a real corporal before you start bossing me about."

HAYWOOD grew rattled. He did not quite know what to do. He did not want to make a scene in a public place, yet he did not like to admit that he had overstepped his authority.

"You'll come with me," he said between clenched teeth. "I'm not afraid of your threats."

He tightened his grip on Mason's arm and gave him a jerk which almost yanked him off his feet. Mason lost his balance and floundered against one of the round, marble topped tables. It teetered sidewise, spilling glasses, an ice bucket, a syphon and some saucers into the laps of a bearded French grocer and his skinny wife.

"Police!" they shrieked of a common accord. "But where is the police? They assassinate themselves, these Legionnaires!"

Other people took up the shout. The owner of the café rushed forward to save his material.

"It's this man," gasped Haywood, trying to drag into prominence the chevron on his left sleeve, while he maintained Mason with the other hand. "I desire to take him back to barracks, for he is drunk."

"Drunk, am I?" yelled Mason, threshing wildly about among the overturned chairs and the broken glassware. "You mealy mouthed liar, you hot air merchant!"

His fist crashed full into Haywood's right eye. Then he hit Haywood again on the nose and had the satisfaction of seeing a bright red stream flow from that battered organ. He was fighting mad, so mad indeed that he forgot all about his bayonet. He slammed home a dozen blows before Haywood could raise his hands. The whole crowd was in a tur-

moil; women shrieked and strong men stormed; Arab bootblacks and Legionnaires egged on the combatants.

"Separate them!" protested the more respectable onlookers. "What beasts they are, these foreigners!"

Haywood recovered from his momentary surprise and caught Mason a crack on the side of the jaw which sent him tottering back on to the bosom of the grocer's wife who, hedged in by the crowd, had not been able to retreat. Forthwith she fainted, and her husband struck Mason over the ear with the silver plated knob of a malacca walking stick.

Mason snatched the cane out of its owner's hands and bashed it so violently against Haywood's forearm that it snapped in two. So did Haywood's forearm. But he made good use of his remaining fist. Cheered on by the onlookers, he stopped Mason with a formidable smack on the top of the head, which almost broke the latter's spine, and followed this up by a straight left which closed both Mason's eyes at one and the same instant.

After that it was all over except for a few finishing touches. Two civilians and a corporal grabbed hold of Mason, an enthusiast hit him with a syphon, and by the time the picket burst through the crowd he had been pounded almost out of existence.

BUT MATTERS did not end there. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently to stand on his feet again, he appeared before a court martial charged with being drunk and creating a disturbance in a public place, striking a superior, refusing to obey an order, damaging government property, to wit, one hot weather uniform, and destroying the property of a civilian. Verdict of the court: Guilty. Sentence: Two years at hard labor.

Mason had struck rock bottom at last. For two years and an extra six months overtime he sweated blood in a quarry up in the hills of Morocco beneath the lash of Senegalese guards, black savages who were only too willing to exert their strength at the expense of the half starved white prisoners they held at their mercy.

And while Mason did time, Soldier of the First Class Thomas Haywood became corporal; the corporal took part in the Beni-Ounif campaign where he earned the military medal for distinguished conduct under fire; at a later date he was promoted to sergeant and cited in army orders for his reckless courage at the taking of Bou Telezat.

There was not a better non-com in the Third Battalion than this sober sided and abstemious sergeant. His men may not have loved him, for he ruled them with an iron hand, but they respected his very real courage and his even temper. At times he was inclined to be rather pompous, and he did not make many friends in the sergeants' mess, for the general impression was that he was striving just a little too blatantly for a lieutenant's commission.

IT WAS shortly after the capture of Bou Telezat, while the battalion was waiting for orders to move forward into the Tafilalet hills, that Mason reappeared upon the scene. He trudged into camp late one afternoon with the rear guard of a supply convoy which had creaked its way across a hundred kilometers of rocky desert. He was crusted with dust and sweat, his heavy pack bowed him down, but he perked up considerably when a bemedaled sergeant answering to the familiar name of Haywood bustled forward to take charge of the new arrivals.

"Why, sure enough!" he exclaimed. "My Gawd, silver striped, *medaille militaire* and everything!"

"*Ferme-moi ça!*" barked the sergeant. "Shut your trap! Speak when you're spoken to. Party—eyes right! Look to your right! Front! Shoulder *hipe!* In fours by the right—*march!*"

Snap, swing and decision, he had them all. It was not until he had assigned each man to his proper place and supervised the mounting of their shelter tents that he condescended to notice Mason.

"So you're back again," he remarked, squaring his shoulders and hitching his thumbs inside his belt. "You'll have to look alive down here. *Faut que ça marche.* I'm forgetting my English. Haven't spoken it for—"

"—for two years and eight months," Mason broke in. "Same here. It's a long time, two years and eight months, Sergeant. A hell of a long time to spend with the penal section."

"Old stuff," rapped Haywood. "Forget it. You're on active service now. No nonsense you understand. Battalion's moving out in a few days."

"Yea," admitted Mason, "right smart. You might 'a' been born a sergeant."

"None of that back chat. I'll stand for no familiarity. Drill that into your thick head at once. I bear you no grudge and I'll treat you like every other Legionnaire. No different. If you cause trouble you'll have to bear the consequences. That's all there is to it."

"Thank you," Mason said. "There's just one thing I'd like to ask: Do you remember the court martial, *my* court martial?"

"What's that? Remember it; yes of course. What of it?"

"Remember the evidence you gave?"

He was standing at attention, as he had been taught to stand by the *chaouch* of the penal section; still as a ramrod, heels together, toes turned out, chest out, hands turned palm outward, little fingers "touching the seams of the trousers," exactly as per copy book. His face was an expressionless mask; he started straight before him, and he spoke almost diffidently.

"Do I remember the evidence I gave?" Haywood repeated. "What are you trying to get at? No, I don't remember. Can't say I do. Other things to think about."

"Well, I been thinking a whole lot." The voice was as gentle as gentle could be. "You said—correct me if I'm wrong—you said I assaulted you that night in the square at Bel Abbes, and you said I was drunk."

Abruptly Haywood threw back his head and laughed.

"Oh, now I know. Quite right. That's what I said. Something had to be done about you. You were going to the dogs. I'll bet you're cured of your boozy ways."

"So—so."

"And perhaps you've made up your mind to play the game like a man."

"Yes indeed," agreed Mason. "I have. I've decided to put a bullet into your hide, Sergeant, first chance comes my way."

"Is that right!"

"Absolutely. I'll plug you good and plenty." A pleasant smile hovered about the corners of his mouth. "I just wanted to warn you." He looked full into Haywood's eyes. "I'm darn' glad we've bumped into one another again," he sighed. "I was hoping we would."

The threat had no effect whatsoever on Haywood.

"Rubbish," he snorted. "You'll find yourself in front of a firing squad if you're not careful."

"It's all one to me."

"Don't be a fool. I'll stand for no such loose talk. For this once I'll forget what you have just said."

"But I'm not likely to forget the two years *and* six months I spent with the Zephyrs because of your lies."

"That'll do," snapped Haywood. "You're a cheap little thug. As nasty a scoundrel as I've ever met in my life. Yes, I sent you to prison, purposely, deliberately, for your own good, but it's done you no good. I can see that. You're hopeless; at the first break you make I'll nail you."

"That's where you're wrong," smiled Mason. "You won't know anything about it. I've already served my sentence. It's your turn. I'll be careful, I sure will. Once is enough!"

Haywood's expression was scornful.

"You can't be careful enough," he asserted. "Don't waste any more time. Clean up your kit and be ready for work bright and early in the morning." He

waved Mason away with an abrupt motion of the hand, "Dismissed!"

MASON really meant what he said. He had thought it out without heat or passion: he was determined to repay Haywood with a well placed bullet at the first opportunity; but the opportunity was slow in coming, for a military camp is a rather public place in which to commit murder and get away with it—too much to do, too many people about.

And the most exasperating feature of the whole business was that Haywood treated him neither better nor worse than anybody else. No matter how hard he tried—and he tried his level best—he could not get a rise out of the sergeant. In the latter's eyes he was simply the right hand, rear rank man of Squad No. 7. When he did his work properly he passed unnoticed; when he slacked off he was brought up with a round turn. Haywood did not even condescend to speak to him in English. It drove the would-be assassin to hard drink. There was the canteen with its stock of wine, and in the ruins of Bou Telezat a swarm of Syrian camp followers had set up shop. They sold everything a Legionnaire could possibly need from spoiled canned goods to synthetic gin.

Until pay day came around Mason was compelled to live a moderately sober life, but pay day arrived at last. He drew sixteen francs representing sixty-four days of the hardest kind of work, and he was all set for a joyous evening.

With a gang of like minded troopers he made a tour of the shanties and came to rest in a dive on the outskirts of the town. It was a terrible place. The walls were cracked and blackened by fire. On the sagging ceiling bedbugs and flies hung in black clusters. There were no tables or chairs—but the imitation cognac was one sou cheaper there than anywhere else and as strong as TNT.

Fifty ungirt and perspiring troopers were packed inside the windowless room. One man, armed with a guitar, was playing the Legion's indecent and blasphemous marching songs. The others joined in the chorus:

"Y en a qui font la mauvaise têtez
Au régiment.
Y tirent au flanc, y font la bête
Inutilement"

Mason, with half a dozen shots of liquid fire under his belt, thoroughly enjoyed the party—while it lasted. Unfortunately it came to an abrupt and unexpected end just as he was about to treat his mates to a heel-and-toe dance *à l' américaine.*

"What shall I play?" inquired the guitarist.

"Anything," declared Mason. "Play the Dead March if you like. They'll be playing it for a sergeant very shortly. He—"

Then he broke off short and the grinning troops surrounding him stood silent and motionless, for the brassy summons of a bugle rang through the night and shook the dilapidated walls.

Somebody cursed.

"That's the 'stand by'. What's up now?"

Fifty pairs of ears strained to catch the order.

"No. 1 Company, fall in! No. 2 Company, fall in!"

Mason, who belonged to No. 1, hooked up the collar of his tunic and clasped his belt buckle about his waist.

"On the double!" rang the summons. "On the double!"

There was a slow surge toward the narrow doorway.

"Night march," grunted a bearded trooper. "Take it easy, my old ones, it is too hot to run."

But a sergeant appeared in the doorway.

"What is it that you are waiting for, band of camels? Outside, all of No. 1 and No. 2. Show some speed or I shall be planting the toe of my boot against your pantaloons!"

"What's up?" inquired Mason, steadying himself as best he could, for the cognac was beginning to affect his legs. "Anything special, *mon sergent?* Is it maneuvers?"

"I'll give you maneuvers!" yelped the sergeant. "There's a rebel *harka* waiting for you at the end of the road you're going to travel."

"Zowie!" cried Mason. "Here's where the guns begin to pop!"

And he sang the Marseillaise in a rasping, unmusical voice until the sergeant, shepherding the party down the dark road, compelled him to shut up.

"Can't I sing patriotic songs?" protested Mason. "It's the first time I've ever been in action. I got to keep my spirits up, ain't I?

"Allons enfants de la Patrie
Le jour de gloire est arrivé . . ."

THE SERGEANT, who was a Bavarian, must have had an innate prejudice against that stirring anthem, for he favored the songster with a mighty kick which sent him crashing into a group of several unsteady Legionnaires. They went down like ninepins.

"Get up!" brayed the sergeant. "Band of *crétins!* Quicker than that!"

Before he was able to extricate himself Mason had been cracked on the jaw, prodded in the ribs and jabbed violently in the stomach. He felt sober and sore. Life was not worth living. He wasn't even allowed to sing the Marseillaise on the eve of battle.

Pursued by the sergeant he jogged down the road leading to the camp. There was a great deal of shouting. Men ran about carrying lanterns; other men tripped over tent ropes and went sprawling; non-coms were astoundingly busy; officers stood about consulting their watches and getting in everybody's way.

"*Allons!*" shouted Sergeant Haywood as soon as his section hove in sight. "Assembly is in five more minutes. Get those tents down quick!"

Mason, however, had lost all his enthusiasm. He did not care if the rebels kicked the French clean out of North Africa. He folded his half of the shelter tent, rolled it and strapped it on to the top of his pack. Then there was his blanket to attach, and a cooking pot, a mess tin, some pickets, his spare boots, and five days' emergency rations. He had to work in the dark, and all the while Haywood stood over him, egging him on.

"Three more minutes to go," boomed the sergeant. "Another two minutes. Come on, Mason! What's keeping you there on your knees?"

"Aw, saying my prayers," grunted Mason. "And you won't be so cocky when I draw a bead on your nut."

He spoke too low, however, for Haywood to hear anything but an indistinct mumble.

A lantern swung down over him.

"Your pack's lopsided," snapped Haywood. "That's your affair. There's no time to fix it now. Strap it on. Up you get!"

Mason groaned as he swung the heavy pack on to his back and fastened the straps. Two hundred rounds of ammunition in his pouches, a water bottle, an entrenching tool. He was loaded down like a donkey, and the Syrian's cognac was making him sick.

"What's keeping you?" rasped Haywood, shoving the lantern within an inch of Mason's nose. "Get a move on quick!"

"Quit crabbing," retorted Mason. "I'm hurrying all I know, ain't I?"

"Well, hurry faster then!" urged Haywood.

Exasperated by the trooper's evident ill will he caught him by the arm and gave him a shove. The last shred of Mason's restraint snapped. He jerked a bullet into the chamber of his rifle, wheeled around and fired. The bullet fanned Haywood's cheek. Before Mason could fire again he brought his hand down on the rifle muzzle.

"Missed," he commented briskly. "You're a rotten shot, Mason. Now you know why I've never bothered about your threats. We're all square, I guess. Snap out of it! Fall in!"

Startled by the sound of the shot, several people came running.

"Yes, I heard it too," Haywood told a sputtering officer. "It came from over there, somewhere—"

"But, I saw a flash!"

"So did I, *mon lieutenant.* It seemed to come from beyond the horse lines."

Bugles were blowing instantly. A whistle shrilled "assembly!"

The officer shrugged his shoulders.

"It is very strange," he commented. "I could have sworn. Still, there's no time to bother about that now. Get up in your places. Double!"

MASON felt weak and shaken. For some unfathomable reason he was glad he had missed Haywood, and yet at the same time he was fiercely angry because the sergeant had treated the incident in such an offhand manner.

Without a word he trotted out and joined his section. The two companies lined up outside the camp and stood motionless.

The senior captain, a lanky, bearded man by the name of Taloneur, rode out of the shadows accompanied by an adjutant carrying a lantern.

" 'Tention!"

The line stiffened.

Taloneur's voice rang out:

"Legionnaires, there's work to be done up ahead. A party of a thousand warriors led by our old friend Ibn Jellud, who escaped us when we captured Bou Telezat, has massacred two of our patrol and is preaching a holy war among the tribes. We'll teach him to steer clear of the Legion. We're going to swing around his flank and drive him down upon Sidi Harbour, where a battalion of Zouaves is waiting to join up with us."

"Yea," grunted Mason, "it's always the Legion has to do the dirty work," and Sergeant Haywood, standing close behind him, nudged him violently with the butt end of his rifle.

"We'll have to hurry," the captain was saying, "and when the time comes to fight, you'll acquit yourselves like Legionnaires— Column of fours to the right!"

"To the right!" echoed the section commanders. "*En avant!*"

Mason was destined to remember that forced march for many a day. It began badly, for his badly adjusted load worked loose and his blanket, jolted out of place, pressed against the nape of his neck. But he could not stop to fix it. Though it was pitch dark Haywood was always near at hand whenever he tried to break ranks.

"When we halt you can straighten it," barked the sergeant. "You can not fall out now."

There were no halts, however, for there was not a minute to waste if Ibn Jellud was to be rounded up. He was said to be seventy kilometers away, lurking in the narrow gorges of the Tafilalet, and unless he was engaged without delay he might slip away, farther back into the hills, out of reach.

Captain Taloneur planned to reach his objective in forty-eight hours. No other troops but the Legion could have done it; no others would have been asked to do it. The column trudged through the night, hammering out the miles. It was suffocatingly hot; a cloud of dust billowed up about the marching men, clogging their throats, sifting inside their clothes, chafing their skin till it was raw and bleeding.

Before the first streak of dawn came into the sky they had covered thirty kilometers—and Mason was almost ready to drop. He lurched along, open mouthed, glassy eyed, stumbling over every stone, dragging his weary body up the never ending slope followed by the trail.

"*Allons!*" croaked Haywood, straightening his own aching shoulders, "Step out. It won't last long now. Lakdar is just ahead."

THE OASIS, where the column was to halt until the heat of the day was over, was dimly visible in the gray dawn light, a black smudge against the plain. Slowly its outlines grew clearer. A clump of date palm trees sprawled along the bank of a deep gully. Behind the trees loomed

the earth colored wall of a native village. Nearer at hand lay an Arab cemetery with its low mounds and rough headstones. A whitewashed shrine with a rounded dome stood in the middle of the graveyard.

In the distance the hilltops were touched with fire; the walls of the shrine turned pink in the light of the rising sun. Full day swept out of the east on the wings of a gust of hot wind.

Up ahead the point men had quickened their pace. They were within a quarter of a mile of the oasis, and the breeze brought them a whiff of damp earth, and mold and water.

A gray bearded Arab standing beneath the trees shaded his eyes with his hand the better to watch the oncoming troopers. A pack of lean dogs raced out to greet them.

"No straggling!" ordered Haywood. "Up in your place, Mason. Get up where you belong. Smartly now!"

Mason cursed between his gritty teeth. His rifle was a ton weight; the pressure of his topheavy pack against the back of his neck was driving him frantic.

"I'll smarten you up pretty soon," he swore. "Me with a goldarned tin can rapping me over the nut at every step. If I had my way—"

He never finished that particular sentence, for the gray bearded Arab had suddenly raised his hand high above his head and, instantly, a puff of smoke eddied among the trees. It spread swiftly along the ground from end to end of the oasis.

Crash! The point men were down, squirming in the dust.

A roar of rifle fire rolled across the plain. Ibn Jellud had not waited to be attacked; he had come more than half way to meet the French. A swarm of bullets plowed the ranks, and a score of Legionnaires were cut down before the column came to a halt.

Startled and wide awake, all his aches forgotten, Mason saw his company commander pitch forward onto his horse's neck and spill clumsily out of the saddle. Thicker came the sleet of lead, shriller. He ducked as gracefully as his awkward load would allow. *Smack!* A slug ripped its way through the cooking pot strapped on top of his pack. *Smack!* His front rank man collapsed, spouting blood through a hole in his throat.

A bugle squawked.

"No. 1 Section," shouted Haywood, "form line to the left!"

He was as deliberate and matter-of-fact as though he had been drilling his men on the exercise ground at the depot. Holding himself as straight as a ramrod, he strode down the front of the section's new alignment and placed himself front center, for the lieutenant lay spread eagled on the ground with a bullet in his heart.

"What the heck!" thought Mason. "If he can do it so can I!"

But it was no easy thing to stand erect and motionless in the face of that stream of bullets.

"Fix bayonets!"

Metal clanged against metal. The lean steel blades winked in the sunlight.

Interminable seconds dragged by. His heart arose and choked him; the pit of his stomach was as hollow as a drum.

"Close your ranks," ordered Haywood. "Steady, No. 1 Section!"

Captain Taloneur had dismounted and stood, sword in hand, midway down the line.

"Legionnaires!" Mason heard him shout. "*En avant!*"

Mason found himself running forward, gripping his rifle so tightly that his knuckles ached. The dust, lashed by the bullets, spurted at his feet. His knapsack joggled loosely on his shoulders, grinding into the small of his back at every step. Panting and cursing he stumbled through the cemetery.

Directly in front of him trotted Haywood, and it flashed through his mind that all he had to do was to stumble over one of the mounds, and lunge forward—nobody would notice it—lunge forward and drive the needle point of his bayonet between Haywood's ribs. But he could

not bring himself to do it. He was going as fast as he could go, and Haywood jogged on always just out of reach.

THEN ALL such thoughts were swept away, for the bugles were giving tongue, sending him on toward the curtain of smoke and flame.

"Y a la goutte à boire, là-haut!
Y a la goutte à boire!"

The line leaped forward, yelling. Captain Taloneur rolled underfoot. Mason had to jump aside to avoid him. He was running like a deer close behind Haywood. His lips curled back off his teeth; he snarled as he caught sight of the dim gray figures stirring behind the smoke drift.

The last bugler, shot through the stomach, braced himself on one elbow and sounded the charge till he choked his bugle with his own blood.

"Y a la goutte à boire, là-haut!
Y a la goutte à boire!"

Haywood half turned toward his men. His mouth opened wide as he yelled:

"*Enfoncez moi ça!* In you go! Get at 'em!"

Into the acrid cloud plunged the battered remnants of the two companies.

A thousand shrieking devils rose up to meet them. A giant in a blue *bournous* slashed at Mason with a broad bladed sword. *Clang!* Steel rasped against steel; the sword turned aside, and home went Mason's bayonet, buried to the hilt in the warrior's chest. A twist of the wrists; a jerk; out came the smoking steel. Parry and thrust and thrust again!

Jammed in an Arab's skull the bayonet snapped like glass. He clubbed his rifle and smashed the steel shod butt into the twisted faces which loomed at him through the haze of dust and smoke and dazzling sunlight. He fought on step by step, clawing his way over the low mud walls, floundering through the stinking mud in the irrigation ditches, until at last he was brought to a standstill in front of a tangle of thorny bushes.

Sheltered behind this screen of bushes the Arabs shot down the troopers at point blank range. There was no getting through. Thrice Haywood led his Legionnaires forward; each time they were compelled to fall back. The section melted away before the fiery blast. It broke up into little groups which were swallowed up in the fog.

Kneeling behind a mound of dead men, Mason pumped lead into the thorny screen. Something stung his shoulder and, though he felt no pain, his left arm grew numb and clumsy. Heavy hands seemed to be bearing down upon the muzzle of his rifle, tilting it slowly toward the ground.

Again he was hit. A split second later he was surprised to find himself sprawling on the flat of his back staring up at the palm trees through which the bullets whistled and clacked. Shafts of golden sunlight fell obliquely through the gaps between the heavy fronds, and in these streaks of sunlight spirals of blue gray smoke curled lazily upward.

The thunder of the rifles had grown muffled as though the battle was ebbing away into the remote distance. He struggled frantically to raise himself off the ground, but he could not move. There was a dull ache in his side, which glowed and throbbed and spread like fire through his veins. His throat was parched and burning. He fumbled at the catch of his water bottle, and a warm, sticky substance ran off his tunic on to his fingers. Raising his hands to the level of his eyes, he saw that they were stained dark red.

Bullets still whistled past him, skimming the ground, drumming into the corpses and making them jerk and quiver spasmodically. He was alone among the dead, for the battle had rolled away momentarily toward the edge of the thicket, where Haywood was trying to strengthen the right of the line which was being driven in and smashed to pieces by overwhelming odds.

By rolling his head sidewise Mason could see the handful of white clad Legion-

naires dodging in and out among the trees. They were as busy as ants, firing, running and firing again. Little knots of Arabs strayed within Mason's field of vision. He could see them run toward the Legionnaires with great angry shouts. The two groups would meet and sway locked together in a furious scrimmage which ended only when one of them had been wiped out. Then the survivors dodged back again among the trees . . .

FOR NO good reason the situation struck Mason as being extremely amusing, and he burst into gales of crazy laughter. He was still laughing when he was struck a tremendous blow which hurled him heels over head against a dead man with a mashed in face. The slug had severed the shoulder strap of his pack; he lay on his side, curled up around the pain which gnawed at his flank.

All at once he caught sight of an Arab crawling out from under the bushes. Another followed, then another; soon there were a score of them. They bent down over a fallen Legionnaire. A knife glistened in the sunlight. The Legionnaire screamed shrilly. Again the knife furrowed his body and again he screamed.

Mason groped along the ground in a vain endeavor to reach his rifle. One of the Arabs, seeing him move, ran toward him. Fear laid hold of Mason, fear which made his eyes bulge and his lips hang apart. In his ears still rang the shrieks of the other man who was being tortured. With a convulsive effort he snatched at his rifle, but his fingers slid clumsily along the smooth stock and could find no purchase.

Then he heard a shout and out of the tail end of his eye he saw a group of Legionnaires rush past him with leveled bayonets. They butted into the Arabs and, pinning them in against the thicket, slaughtered them.

A bulky figure came between Mason and the struggling knot of men, and a familiar voice shouted in his ear:

"Column is falling back. It's hopeless."

Mason looked up into Haywood's blood smeared face.

"Say," he wheezed, "hand me a gat, will you. I'm licked."

"Can't you hobble? We'll wait for you. I'm in charge of the rear guard. We're pulling out a section at a time. Don't want to leave anybody behind."

"You'll have to leave me. I'm shot to hell. Give me a gun and make sure it's loaded. I seen what they been doing to Kautski."

Haywood shook his head. He stooped over and took Mason in his arms.

"You're light," he explained. "Carry you—far's possible."

Mason ground his teeth to choke back the shout of agony which filled his throat.

"It's no good," he pleaded, whimpering. "God Almighty! I don't mind croaking. Put me down!"

"That'll do!" snapped Haywood. "Shut up and hold on tight!"

He slung Mason over his shoulder and let him hang head downward, effectively putting an end to all possible argument. Then he rounded up what was left of his section and marched it out of the oasis in orderly fashion.

Three hundred men had stumbled into the trap set for them by Ibn Jellud. Ninety came out. They retired unmolested, for the Arabs had a bellyful of fighting and had no wish to face the fire of those ninety rifles in the open.

The rear guard suffered most. Before it passed out of range it had to face a hail of lead which cut its ranks to ribbons, but Haywood held it steady, and when the fighting died completely away, when the last shot had been fired, he went down as if he had been poleaxed, riddled with bullets, leaking like a sieve.

Mason who was past caring what became of him lay where he fell, face downward in the dust.

"He's not dead," Haywood told the troopers who gathered him up. "Bring him along too."

And Mason, when the fever abated, awoke much the worse for wear in the hospital ward at Bou Telezat.

SEVERAL days elapsed before he took any active interest in his surroundings. Every so often a white coated devil probed the wound in his side, and the wound in his shoulder, not to mention a wound in the small of his back. It was all very painful and unpleasant, and after it was over he was quite content to lie and stare at the flies crawling on the canvas ceiling.

One morning, however, he was startled to see a solemn procession file into the tent; there was a full colonel and a whole flock of senior officers whose spurs jingled and whose swords rattled as they walked. Preceded by the surgeon major, they trooped down the central aisle between the beds and came to a halt at the far end of the ward. There was a buzz of voices, and curiosity impelled Mason to hitch himself up on his pillows just in time to see the colonel bend down and fasten the crimson ribbon of the Legion of Honor on Sergeant Haywood's flannel nightshirt.

"What do you know about that?" pondered Mason. "Well, I guess he had it coming his way."

". . . heroic conduct," he heard the colonel saying, "worthy of the best traditions of the Legion. Skillfully covered the retreat though badly wounded and averted what might have been a rout. Rescued several badly wounded men who, without his intervention, would have fallen into the hands of the rebels."

He leaned over and kissed Haywood's bearded cheeks; then he stepped back and saluted. Everybody imitated his gesture. Haywood turned the same color as the ribbon of his medal. The ceremony was over.

Mason slid down under the sheets to avoid having to sit at attention while the colonel went by.

"Two years and six months in prison," he summed up. "A dirty trick if ever there was one. He's got a screw loose. It's that son of a gun of a conscience of his. I'll say he's a wet blanket. Still he saved my life, for what it's worth, and that ain't much. I should 'a' plugged him sooner. Guess I'll have to call it off."

Having reached this decision he felt much better. Indeed, he felt as though he were too good to live much longer and was quite alarmed that evening when his temperature went up two points.

"They say some guys reform before they pass out," he muttered. "But what the heck, I ain't reformed!"

Nevertheless, as soon as he was able to hobble across the ward he paid a call on the sergeant.

"Congratulations," he grinned. "That bit of ribbon looks right smart. And—er—say, I'm much obliged to you. Sure am."

"You don't have to thank me," said Haywood. "Couldn't very well leave you behind. You did pretty well yourself, Mason." He chuckled. "You didn't plug me after all. I didn't think you would."

"Aw, you don't have to rub it in. I'm—well, I'm sorry that shot went off before we started out. Say, Sergeant, anything I can do for you any time just shout. Anything, that is," he added hastily, "short of going on the wagon. I couldn't do that for a million dollars."

A solemn expression appeared on Haywood's emaciated countenance.

"You'll never get anywhere until you learn how to practise a little self-control," he declared. "Before you can hope to become a good soldier—"

"Excuse me, Sergeant," Mason broke in, "but I'm sort of unsteady on my pins. I guess I'd better crawl back to bed. And as I was saying—I'm much obliged."

The poor boob, he decided, might be a good sergeant, but he was certainly not good company, not by a long shot.

While they were cooped up in the field ambulance they could not very well avoid each other, and Mason heaved a sigh of relief when they were sent back to the base hospital. There their ways parted.

He was sick of having to be grateful all day long. With Haywood about he was ashamed of being seen smoking a cigaret, and when the orderly brought around the wine ration he gulped it down, feeling all the while like a criminal.

HOWEVER, he recovered quickly enough once Haywood's reproachful gaze was no longer glued upon him. He recovered so quickly, indeed, that the medical authorities kicked him out of hospital before he had had time to get genuinely pickled on officers' invalid port more than twice.

Back to barracks he went with a slight limp and an unquenchable thirst. Unsympathetic drill sergeants quickly cured him of his limp, but the thirst remained.

He nursed it along with loving care until he had accumulated a small capital of ten francs. Then with a determination worthy of a better cause he went out to have a party. Instead of heading straight for the grog shops he made a wide detour through the Botanical Gardens, just for the pleasure of prolonging the agony a few minutes more.

At dusk the garden at Sidi bel Abbes is a dreary spot. Something of the homesickness and despair which three generations of Legionnaires have dragged down its sanded alleys lingers in the hot air. There is a bitter mockery about its neatly labeled shrubs and its nondescript statuary.

But Mason was neither homesick nor downcast. He sauntered along with his hands in his pockets and a cigaret smoldering between his lips. And around a bend in the alley, close to the statue of Icarus, he found Sergeant Haywood sitting in an attitude of utter dejection, holding his head between his fists. The sight was so unexpected that Mason stopped dead in his tracks.

"For the love of Mike!" he exclaimed. "Hello, Sergeant. I ain't seen you for a coon's age. Anything wrong?"

No answer.

Mason pushed his *képi* onto the back of his head, shrugged his shoulders and went on, whistling softly between his teeth. After a few steps he paused and glanced around. Haywood had not moved.

It was more than Mason could stand.

"Y'ain't feeling bad, are you?" he inquired, ambling back to the bench. "Nothing I can do?"

Still no answer. Haywood sat like stone.

"All right," snorted Mason. "Have it your own way. I ain't butting in. Maybe you are a sergeant, but that's no reason for not being civil. Saved my life, didn't you? Can't you speak?"

Haywood stirred uneasily. He looked up, and Mason saw that his face was ravaged and tormented.

"Need any help about anything?" he inquired.

"Nothing anybody can do," Haywood said wearily. "Nothing. I'm licked."

"Gwan! That's what I said back at Lakdar, but you dragged me out of that mess. What's on your mind?"

"I'm a darn' fool, that's all." Haywood was silent for a moment; then he burst out, "I might as well tell somebody; you'll see for yourself. You remember I used to be first officer on the *Carmarthen?*"

"Sure enough. You had nightmares about that boat."

"Well—" he cleared his throat—"back home I had a wife and two kids. When the—that accident occurred I lost my nerve. Couldn't face going home. Too much to explain. They thought I was better than I really am. I'm weak, that's what's wrong with me. Weak and mean."

"You hide it pretty well."

"I've had to. Anyway, after I enlisted I let things drift along. Didn't write to my wife. I was ashamed to let 'em know where I was, you understand. But I always meant to write. Lately things began to look different. That was after I was given the Legion of Honor, and there's just a chance I'll be recommended for a commission before long."

"Pretty slick!"

"I thought so, too, and while I was in hospital I wrote to my wife. All along the idea had been there at the back of my head. I thought she'd wait, if only because of the kids—and I heard from her today."

His clenched fist opened. Crumpled in the palm lay the torn fragments of a sheet of note paper.

"She got her divorce," he explained

dully. "Remarried. That's nothing. I don't mind about her. It's the kids I'm worried about. She put 'em in a home. No money. My God!" he muttered. "What a swine I've been!"

"Well, we all make mistakes," Mason suggested. "And anyway, as soon's you get your commission you'll be able to take care of your children. So what's the use of worrying now?"

"Take care of 'em on a lieutenant's pay? No, I've got to go home at once. I can't wait. I've waited too long." The words came tumbling from his lips. "My two kids in some damn' asylum. It's driving me crazy. They need me—and one of 'em's sick. Oh, she rubbed it in all right. I must get home. I must!"

"If you're thinking of deserting you're a darn' fool," retorted Mason. "Your time's almost up now. Another six months at the most. That's nothing—six months."

"It's hell, that's what it is!" cried Haywood. "I don't know what to do."

"If I was in your boots I'd have a couple of drinks and go to bed," Mason declared. "But you're not a drinking man. There's nothing you can do now that I can see."

"That's just the trouble. I'm helpless." Haywood jumped to his feet and threatened the flaming sky with his upraised fist. "Six months to wait. I'm the greatest coward on earth. I ran away. I left my two children just because my reputation had been smashed. *I* didn't want to suffer—"

He controlled himself with difficulty.

"I'm sorry," he said abruptly. "I can't talk about it any more. I've got to think it out by myself. Good night!"

He swung on his heel and hurried away down the alley.

"Poor nut!" commented Mason.

HE FLIPPED the fag end of his cigaret into the shrubbery and, cocking his *képi* over one ear, sauntered jauntily out of the garden. He was very sorry for Haywood, but he did not intend to let his sorrow spoil a perfectly good evening. He was scheduled to go south again in a few days, and the present opportunity was far too good to waste.

He wasted nothing but his money. Three hours later, broke, well oiled and contented, he headed back toward the barracks. His way led through the maze of lanes behind the native market. At that time of night—it was close on ten—the neighborhood was almost deserted except for the dubious folk who cater to the thirsts and other peculiarities of Legionnaires: Syrians and Arabs, Maltese and Italians, all the riffraff of North Africa which makes a living out of the troopers' meager wages.

Through the closed shutters came the muffled wheeze of accordions and the faint rattle of mechanical pianos. Here and there, streaming through a half open doorway, a patch of yellow lamplight stabbed the darkness. The air was heavy with the smell of rotting cabbage stalks, cheap scent and roasting coffee. The echo of a woman's high pitched laughter trailed across the flat rooftops.

All at once, as he came around a sharp bend, Mason heard a yell, which cut knifelike through the blurred sounds of the street. Other voices joined in almost instantly, growing louder from second to second.

At the end of the street, by the light of a hanging lantern, Mason caught sight of a gesticulating group of civilians closing in upon a Legionnaire who stood against the wall, fending off his assailants with a bayonet.

Mason did not stop to think about the possible consequences of his conduct. Like all other Legionnaires, he had a standing grudge against civilians. He gathered himself together and went galloping down the street. He may have been a trifle unsteady on his pins, but when he hit the crowd it gave way beneath the impact.

Somebody took a swipe at him with a stick and knocked off his *képi*, and a knife ripped his tunic open from collar to waist. Otherwise he was still undamaged when he reached the trooper.

"*On les a!*" he shouted. "Skin 'em alive!" Then, goggled eyed, he gasped, "Haywood!"

And Haywood it was, gray faced, sweating, his uniform splashed with wine and blood.

The mob, confronted by two bayonets instead of one, stood back and pelted the Legionnaires with stones, filth and foul words.

"How come the riot?" inquired Mason, dodging a hunk of brick which exploded against the wall inches above his head.

"That fellow there in the gutter," panted Haywood, "tried to stab me. I ran him through."

The man, huddled in the gutter, was dead. A thin trickle of blood oozed out of the triangular wound in his throat.

"*À mort!*" shrieked the crowd. "Kill them, the lousy foreigners!"

"You're in dutch," grunted Mason.

"I had a few drinks. I couldn't help it. I must have gone crazy. I don't know what happened."

"You birds when you flop off the wagon—" began Mason. He left the sentence hanging in midair and said sharply, "Here, you got to pull your freight before the picket arrives."

"It's too late."

"Do what you're told and don't argue," retorted the soldier of the second class. "Edge off to the left and beat it down that alley. I'll hold 'em."

"But—"

"There ain't no buts. You pulled me out of a tight corner at Lakdar. They'd have carved me up if I'd been left behind. Can't have a guy with the Legion of Honor accused of murder. It is murder—Beat it!"

"What'll you say?"

"What's it to you. You keep your trap shut and think of those brats of yours. Let's go!"

The mob gave way before the bayonets. The two Legionnaires reached the mouth of the valley.

"For all you're worth!" ordered Mason. "Go! If you say one word I'll let daylight into you!"

For a second Haywood wavered, then abruptly he turned on his heel and fled.

THE PATROL reached the scene of the disorder just in time to save Mason from being torn to pieces, for the bayonet had been knocked out of his hand and the mob was kicking him savagely.

As soon as he was fit to stand up he appeared before his judges. The witnesses asserted that the prisoner had had an accomplice. Some of them even went so far as to maintain that the accomplice had been a sergeant, but the president of the court quickly put an end to what he called "their aspersions upon the honor, character and dignity of the non-commissioned officers of the Legion". A private might conceivably commit such a crime—a sergeant never, or not unless he was caught red handed.

"Had you an accomplice?" inquired the court.

"Certainly not," the prisoner declared stolidly.

"You admit having killed the deceased, Emilio Gattini?"

"I forgot to find out what he was called," apologized Mason. "He was wearing a blue singlet; that's about all I know about him."

The verdict was a foregone conclusion. For the sake of appearances the court retired long enough to smoke a cigaret or so. Then it reconvened and the guards presented arms.

"In the name of the people of France," read the president, "the Soldier of the Second Class William Mason, having been found guilty of murder, is hereby condemned to death."

And Mason went back to his cell with a faint smile on his lips, which convinced his judges that they had been very wise to have shown no mercy in the case of such a hardened criminal.

The days dragged by until one morning the door swung open and the prison chaplain entered the cell.

"*Mon fils,*" he said, seating himself beside Mason, "I have been talking to

some civilians, an Italian, among others, who was a friend of this Gattini."

"Well?"

The priest laid a hand on Mason's shoulder and looked him full in the eyes.

"Why are you shielding Sergeant Haywood?" he asked. "He killed Gattini."

"That is for me to decide," retorted Mason. "I do not mind dying. It doesn't matter. Moreover, long ago, I was due for the electric chair in America." He tried to bluster. "I am an enemy of society. Haywood can not afford to die."

"And why not?"

"Aw, he had a couple of infants back home. He was much worried about them, you comprehend, *mon père.* When he heard that these children were homeless what does he do but go off and have a drink. He is a good man when sober, but alcohol makes a fool of him. There are such men."

"And so?"

"What else? I found him fighting these civilians. There was a dead man in the gutter. Knowing what I knew, what would you have done in my place?"

"I begin to understand," murmured the priest.

"You see," Mason went on slowly, "this Haywood is not a criminal such as I am; moreover he once saved my life, and that is not a thing one easily forgets. For the sake of the children he must live. I had neither father nor mother when I was small and—would you deprive two children of their father, a good father, even though he had made a few mistakes? Would you?"

The priest was silent, but a look of infinite pity and compassion was in his eyes.

"Haywood's not to blame," Mason went on. "He can't stand liquor—that's all that's the matter with him. He'll never touch another drop as long as he lives, and he deserves another chance. Do something for me, Father. Make sure he doesn't butt in at the last minute. Please."

"Your mind is made up?"

"Absolutely made up."

FORTY-EIGHT hours later, at dawn, he was led out to the exercise ground and placed with his back against a stake. He refused to have his eyes bandged and faced the firing squad without a tremor. Drawn up on three sides of the square, the battalion fixed bayonets and presented arms. The priest kissed Mason on the forehead and retreated backward a step at a time, holding a crucifix high in his trembling hands.

An adjutant stepped forward, sword in hand.

"Take aim!" The order rang crisply in the clean morning air.

Up came the twelve rifles of the firing squad. Mason turned his head slightly and grinned at the priest.

"Fire!"

Mason rocked back against the post, swayed there for a brief second, then dropped to his knees. Slowly at first, then with increasing momentum, he fell forward on to his face.

The adjutant stepped forward and pronounced the prisoner dead.

The drums rolled and the massed bugles of the regiment sang in the morning sunlight as the battalion marched past the crumpled figure.

And the priest standing beside the thing that had been Bill Mason read, not the prayer of the dead, but the martyrs' requiem.

And Haywood, at his appointed hour, went home to his children.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

An Absorbing Tale of the Sea by the Author of "Fenceless Meadows"

By BILL ADAMS

IT WAS misty weather in the Bristol Channel. All day, lost in blankets of scarce moving fog, the shoreline to the north and south of Bude haven had been invisible. Now and again for a few moments an ominous sky had appeared above an equally ominous sea.

It was a windless day, a November day, and men who looked seaward from the end of the little breakwater at the entrance to the haven seemed gloomy as the weather and had little to say. No coasting craft entered or left the tiny harbor where lay a topsail schooner, a small foreign brig, and a number of ketches. Coaster crews sipping their ale in the haven inn talked in subdued voices.

Toward midafternoon the fog grew denser and, instead of hanging in almost motionless folds along the steep cliffs to the north and south of the haven, began to drift inland, and up channel toward Avonmouth. Then coaster skippers who looked from the windows of the inn shook their heads. With the approach of evening the wind freshened from westward.

Apart from the other coaster men, as if desiring to keep to himself, sat the skipper of the foreign brig, a slenderly built but sinewy looking man of twenty-seven years. His face was swarthy, his hair black as a crow's wing. With his elbows resting on the table, his face half hidden in his hands, he sat with bowed

head and, his thumb pads covering his ears as if to shut away the sound of other men's voices, seemed lost in thought. When now and again he raised his coaly eyes for a moment and glanced about the barroom there was a look of great sadness in his face. At times, when the backs of all others were toward him, his look was one of fiery hate.

As the gloom of evening began to draw in, the skipper of the foreign brig rose and without word or nod to any one took his departure from the inn. After he was gone, his going unnoticed by any, the other coaster men continued to talk of blows that had been in bygone Novembers, of gales that had roared along the rocky shores by Bude. Ships long lost, sailors long drowned were recalled by men who spoke in tones of dread or of defiance, according to the manner of men the sea had made of them.

THE SKIPPER of the brig took his way to the foot of a steep and winding path that led from near the haven entrance to the summit of the high cliff that beetled above it. Passing his brig, he bestowed no glance upon her, nor on the tide that swirled about the harbor mouth. With his face turned ever seaward, with now a mournful and now a savage look in his dark eyes, he hurried on as if there were something beyond the seaward fog banks upon which his mind was set. With a sou'wester pulled tightly down upon his head, with his lithe body braced against a squally and continually increasing wind, he came in a little while to the cliff top. Behind him Bude lay hidden in fog. North and south the coast line was invisible. An invisible sea moaned in rock pools far below him. With his chin sunk in the unbuttoned collar of his oilskin coat he peered into the blanket of the offshore mists.

Presently the fog was driven apart by a sharp squall and, while Bude behind him and the shoreline to north and south remained invisible, a long narrow passage opened seaward. Peering along the momentary air lane cloven in the dreary November weather, the foreign skipper caught sight of the dim shape of a small bark a mile or so offshore, and bound down channel toward the open Atlantic. He turned then, instantly. All mournfulness vanished from his swarthy features. With an expression of eager satisfaction he hurried from the cliff top. As though he had no moment to spare, as though impatient of the fast closing day, he broke into a run and, keeping to the grasses that bordered the narrow trail by which he had ascended, made no sound as he dashed down the steep slope. Sheep jumped up and lumbered away, to turn and stare after him when he was gone. Gulls, come in from the approaching storm and motionless on the mist wet grasses, circled noiselessly from his advance.

When he came to the foot of the slope the foreign skipper hurried at once to his brig. Having climbed to the small boat that hung in davits at her stern, he cast the lashings off her with swift fingers. In a few moments she was afloat and he had leaped into her and was throwing off the lashing that held her mast and its sail to the thwarts.

With the door shut on the inclement weather, the folk in the inn still talked of lost ships and drowned companions, and gave no thought to the skipper of the foreign brig. There was no one to see him as he hoisted his boat's sail, no one to see as the wind drove him through the hissing waters at the harbor mouth and on out to the long black swells that rolled in from the open Atlantic. Erect in the stern sheets, he peered into the mists, his little craft tossing like a cork on the fast rising seas.

Save the high crying of the westerly weather there was no sound as, with tiller in one hand and sheet in the other, he steered boldly away from the shore. With his face to the wind he balanced himself easily and seemed no more fearful of the elements than were the gulls that now and again wheeled by. Steering, as though steering in such wild weather were second

nature to him, he stared constantly into the fog and appeared as though listening for some expected sound, the sea so angry that it seemed that he must at any moment be swamped. Suddenly his half parted lips closed and, gripping the tiller with a yet firmer hand, he peered into the dense mists with an expression of intense satisfaction on his olive features. Though his frail craft was overswept by spray, though she was continually flung from sea top to sea top and hurled to the low deeps of dark troughs between, he paid no more heed to danger than did the shoreward flying birds.

Faint above the moan of the weather there had come to the expectant ears of the brig's skipper a sound to be distinguished from that of the fast gathering storm by only such ears as were well accustomed to listening for such a sound. Easing his sail away, he flew from crest to crest and, careless of the water that swirled in his boat's bottom he raced toward the direction whence had come the expected wail of a sailing vessel's fog horn.

Presently there loomed through the fog an indistinct shape, and in another moment the brig's skipper had run in close under a square stern. As he read the vessel's name, *Teresa* of Lisbon, his eyes flashed. Putting his tiller over, he steered his boat to leeward of the heeling bark; then, having noiselessly gathered in his sail, he made his painter fast in her chains and peered up to her railings; the fog was now so dense that not only the tophamper but the very rigging within a few feet of his head was become invisible.

Leaping to the *Teresa's* railing, the brig's skipper peered along her deck. Seeing no one, hearing no one, he dropped silently to her planks and stole cautiously aft.

IT WAS the time of first dog watch. The *Teresa's* skipper was below in her cabin, with the mate seated across the table from him. The decks were in charge of the second mate who, having gone forward to look at the sidelights, had stayed to converse with the cook in his galley amidships.

The brig's skipper approached the *Teresa's* wheel and laid a steady hand upon it. Numb with the cold, thinking that his two hour trick was gone even faster than he had hoped for it to go and supposing that one of his comrades was come to relieve him, the helmsman relinquished his hold upon the wheel and turned it over to the brig's skipper. Descending from the wheel grating, he beat his cold hands upon his sides; then, with a parting glance at the compass, he gave his relief the course and hurried off toward the forecastle.

As soon as the helmsman was well away the skipper of the brig threw the helm up and deliberately headed the *Teresa* for the shore. Its outcry shrill in her tophamper, a squall caught her and lifted her forward; and, gathering speed, she flew toward the rocks by Bude haven. with the sea roaring beside her.

Until he heard shouts of dismay from the forward deck and a bellowed oath from the cabin below him the brig's skipper held her as she was; then, darting from the helm, he left her abandoned to her inescapable fate and leaped to his well nigh swamped boat.

Immediately caught by the lee, her sails all aback, the bark lay helpless and in irons upon the rocky shore but a short distance to leeward with black seas lapping hungrily around her.

Unseen and unsuspected, the skipper of the brig pushed his boat from beneath the doomed bark's side. Oaths and bellowed orders reached him as he set his sail and sped into the shoreward darkness. Driving shoreward, he listened to the roar of breakers and sought with long practised ears for the varying note in their tone that should tell him just where lay the entrance to the harbor. Soon, from the summit of a high ridge, he glimpsed for an instant the dim glimmer of the lighthouse at the breakwater's end and, within the space of two or three minutes, his hand steady on the tiller, the wind

hard in his outbellied sail, half flew, half sailed, into the smoother waters of the harbor mouth.

HIS MISSION accomplished, the brig's skipper worked in feverish haste to hoist his boat back to her place at his vessel's stern. His *sangfroid* was gone now. Sweat broke out upon his swarthy brow. His hands trembled. Not till the boat was secure, with her cover lashed down upon her, did he dare to hesitate and listen for any sound from the sea; then he leaned nervously upon the bulwarks, bare headed with his face to the fog and the wind. When presently a sound other than that of wind and breakers came to his ears his nervousness passed, and when within a few moments of that sound hurrying feet drew nigh he jumped ashore and called a question to runners who approached from the direction of the town and inn.

"Below the signal cliff!" came the alarmed reply and, as though to corroborate the speaker's words, there came again, appealing and insistent, the dull boom of a distress rocket.

While the brig's skipper ran at the heels of the crowd the mists thinned and a full moon shone feebly on the stormy coastline. From the foot of the high cliff the crowd gazed into the seaward gloom, seeking a glimpse of the wreck. They saw her presently, her bow thrown high upon an outreaching rocky reef. Her boom was gone already. Her forecastle-head was swept by spray, her back broken and her after part nowhere to be seen. Of her three masts only the forelower-mast remained standing, and in its shivering shrouds clung three forlorn figures upon whom the onlookers turned horrified eyes.

The brig's skipper stood alone, apart from the crowd and, as he gazed at the remains of the *Teresa*, he smiled as though nothing could better have suited him than that she should be as she was.

Holding one another's hands, a line of would-be rescuers moved cautiously out into the swirling rock pools while fragments of wreckage drifted about them and, now in almost total darkness, now in faint moonshine, watched the foaming waters in the hope that they might find some survivor.

Keenest eyed of all the watchers was the brig's skipper. Standing waist deep in a rock pool hidden from the others by a sharp rock ridge, he ignored floating deck buckets, gratings and fragments of timber; as he moved warily closer and closer to the wreck, he kept his eyes upon the three forlorn figures in her fore shrouds, apparently endeavouring to recognize among them some familiar member of the *Teresa's* company. While the would-be rescuers still groped in the chilly waters he saw a large piece of broken spar drifting toward him. Reaching it just as a receding wave left it with its shoreward end lodged against a rocky ledge, he grasped it and before the next wave could lift it had hauled it farther shoreward. Lashed along it was a large remnant of sail, and within the water stiffened canvas the unmistakeable shape of a human form.

Having dragged the spar to a position whence the sea would be unable to snatch it, the brig's skipper drew a long knife from the sheath at the back of his belt and hastily cut the lashings that held the canvas to it.

Wreathed in sea sodden golden hair that seemed to catch and hold the wavering moonrays, the lifeless eyes of a young and lovely woman stared glassily up into the face of the brig's skipper. His lips fallen apart, his swarthy face ghastly with horror, he fell to his knees and with supplicating hands clasped before him bent over her. Unconscious of the turmoil of the storm, of the cries of would-be rescuers within a few feet of him on the other side of the rock ridge, heedless now of the three doomed forms still clinging in the shaking rigging of the wrecked bark's foremast, he vainly wailed a name to which the woman at his knees paid no heed. Fallen prone in the cold foam beside her, he implored the drowned

to answer him and, with trembling fingers, fondled her marble white features.

Not till, as the wreck's foremast toppled to the waiting sea, faint shrieks rang from the hungering breakers and a loud shout of dismay rose from beyond the rock ridge, did he stagger to his feet. Then, while he watched one last strong swimmer vainly battle a merciless sea in sudden full radiance of a mistless moon, there came to his face a look of recognition and of utter hate. As a pair of strong arms beat ever more feebly, as a black head bobbed and bearded face looked piteously to the clear moon he watched complacently, and when the sea rolled over that last swimmer he seemed for an instant to breathe deeply. Then, hate gone from his coaly eyes, and only horror there, he knelt again. He knelt for but a moment. Startled to action by a scarce heard sound from within soaked canvas that yet half hid the dead girl's form, he ripped the canvas loose. As cries came from over the rock ridge he leaped to his feet and ran with a tiny oilskin covered bundle tightly clasped in his arms.

While others found and carried from the sea's edge the lifeless form of the girl the brig's skipper stole swiftly and unseen from the shore and dashed toward his vessel. Having placed the oilskin covered bundle on the coarse coverlet of his bunk he lighted his cabin lamp and bent above it. With a dimpling smile about his lips, a tiny child looked up at him.

In a little while the brig's skipper stepped ashore again. Meeting the returning crowd, he mingled with them. Unheeded by any, he listened to their talk, seeking to discover whether the body of the last swimmer had been taken from the water. When they came to the inn he sat awhile amongst them and, himself the one untalkative of all men there, heard tales of the swirling tides that, hurrying along the shores by Bude, leave seldom any flotsam strewn along the rock ledges.

Morning broke bright and clear, the fury of the night gone. With a light breeze blowing from the north and east the coaster crews made haste to take advantage of the tide and get their craft to sea. First of them all the brig went seaward.

A MAN of some fifty odd years, a black bearded man with swart face, sturdy shoulders and strong arms sat with wine before him in the parlor of a small inn by Bristol docks. Secured in a rough splint, his right leg was outstretched upon a chair before him. On his dark features, in his coaly eyes, was a scowl; a scowl in part of pain, but mostly of annoyance.

The innkeeper, a wrinkled and crow footed fellow, seamed more by life itself than by his span of years, entering the room where the black bearded man sat, returned his nod with a muttered oath.

"A fine morning," said the man in the chair.

"A fine morning, is it? Have ye forgot it blew like fury i' the night?" retorted the innkeeper.

"The *Teresa*'ll have been well clear o' land," growled the other.

"Maybe. Maybe not," replied the innkeeper, and added savagely, " 't'was never i' the bargain that ye should take my girl beyond the sea."

"Nor out of it either," snapped the other. "Never a word about it, one way or the other."

For a moment there was silence. Then, with a taunt in his voice, the swarthy man spoke again.

"Ye didn't have to make a bargain if ye didn't want."

"Thievin' foreign pig," cried the old innkeeper, and the other regarded him amusedly.

"Would I'd never seen your dirty dago money," continued the innkeeper.

"Ye'd have been turned out to the street before this," laughed the black bearded man; and for a time there was silence again, while the innkeeper stared moodily out to the cobblestoned street and the dock beyond it and the other sat as though deep in thought.

"A man that'll sell his own daughter

away to a dirty dago just to get himself free of debt needs the devil's toes i' his neck," growled the old innkeeper presently.

"Ye could have thought of that before," answered the other, and added, "if ye'd let her go off wi' that boy o' mine ye'd still have had a dirty dago as ye call it in your family, an' ye'd have got nothing out of it."

" 'T'would 'a' been natural leastways," snarled the innkeeper. "She was in love with him anyway, or thought she was."

"Her boy's mine," replied the other. "That settles all that."

"Her boy's yours, eh?" sneered the innkeeper. "So ye think that's sure, do ye?"

The foreigner half rose in his chair and glowered savagely at the innkeeper; and again for a time there was silence.

" 'T'was a wild night," said the innkeeper presently. "What if the *Teresa* met wi' trouble? The skipper ye sent i' your place don't know these coasts."

"The *Teresa* was well off shore before the blow came up," snapped the other.

"If anything happened to her wi' my poor girl aboard" began the innkeeper; pausing, he stared appraisingly at the swarthy man. "If anything happened to my girl your son'd kill ye."

"Oh, aye!" The other laughed. "An' without the girl aboard her he'd be glad to have the *Teresa* an' me with her at the sea bottom." Then, grown suddenly savage, he cried, "Leave it be! Leave it be! The *Teresa's* well away for Lisbon."

"What if she's at the sea bottom," said the innkeeper, "an' my poor girl with her? Mind how he cursed us both, you an' me alike? Mind how he vowed he'd have vengeance, you dago? Small wonder ye've a broke leg! To hell wi' you an' such bargains as yours!"

"Takes two for a bargain," laughed the swarthy man.

And again for a time there was a moody silence while ships passed up and down in the dock over the cobblestoned way.

"Suppose," whispered the old innkeeper presently; stepping close to the swarthy man he looked from wrinkled eyes into his face. "Suppose as the *Teresa* is at the sea bottom?"

The foreign man stared at the innkeeper with a hint of fear in his black eyes.

"It'd be ruin for me," he murmured. "All I've got's with the *Teresa.* When she fetches to Lisbon she and the rich cargo in her'll be sold." His face brightened. "I'll be rich enough then," he continued. "Maybe we'll be sending for you to come live with us."

With a malevolent scowl on his face, the innkeeper went to the bar room.

WITH his leg outstretched on the chair before him, the swarthy man sat by the parlor window and stared over the cobblestoned street at the shipping. Watching those who passed along the street, he now and then caught fragments of their talk. And now and then a passer-by caught a glimpse of his bearded face behind the soiled window curtain.

"Yonder's the skipper of the dago bark what was wrecked by Bude haven last night," said a passerby. "He didn't go to sea with her, then."

"It ain't he," said another. "He went to sea with her."

"No," said a third. "He'd a leg broke an' stayed behind when she went down river for Avonmouth an' the sea. He sent some other in his place."

The swarthy man's face was ghastly under its olive. Leaning forward, he thumped on the barroom wall with a clenched fist.

His face ghastly as that of the foreign man, the old innkeeper re-entered the parlor.

"Ye've heard, then?" whispered the innkeeper, and the other stared at him voicelessly.

"My girl's dead! My girl's dead!" whimpered the old innkeeper.

Wincing with the pain of his leg, the other half rose, and fell back in his chair.

"Never a soul saved! Never a soul!" said the innkeeper. "The boy'll think ye drowned wi' her."

The inn door creaked open as thirsty men entered and looked round the barroom.

"Let's get out o' here," said a voice from the barroom. "The old devil of an innkeeper's daughter got drowned last night. Come on away!"

While the innkeeper returned to his barroom the foreign man struggled up on his good leg. As he crawled into the barroom the innkeeper shot the bolt of the street door.

"Ye didn't have to make the bargain," whined the foreign man, his frightened eyes on the other's face.

"To the road ye'll go," cried the innkeeper savagely. "Ye've killed my poor girl."

Shivering with the pain of his leg, the foreign man stared at the innkeeper, and as if taking sudden pity on him the old fellow filled a mug.

"Drink an' get out!" said the innkeeper.

"This is all mine. I gave it you," said the other, and waved a hand about the dingy barroom.

"Ye bought my poor girl wi' it," moaned the old innkeeper; he tossed a long draft of liquor down his withered throat. The foreign man put his mug to his lips.

"I'm done wi' ye! Dirty dago! Dirty dago! Drink an' get out!" cried the innkeeper, and took another long swallow.

They sat face to face. Again and again the innkeeper put a bottle to his lips. Again and again the foreign man tilted a demijohn.

"Drink an' get out!" the old innkeeper kept saying, and still they drank; while one after another passer-by tried the door and, finding it locked, went on his way.

Afternoon came. The foreign man was drunk, sodden and outstretched on the barroom floor; the innkeeper with his arms flung over the bar and his face buried in them.

At dusk the old innkeeper staggered out to the street, leaving his door locked behind him. The wind was gone. The air was very still. A November evening, rimy with frost. Stars twinkled. Dock lights glimmered. Over the cobblestoned way masts towered toward frosty stars.

The withered old innkeeper tottered away, on and on, and came by and by to the drawbridge. Leaning over the bridge railing, he stared down to glimmery water. Seeing imagined faces that returned his stare, he trembled. He stayed there a long time, unable to move, drink in his veins and fear in his soul. By and by he leaned farther over the bridge rail. Dock lights flickered in a sudden wind. Lips in the glimmery water seemed to call to him. He leaned, farther, and farther yet, over the rimy railing.

"T'OWLD innkeeper," said one of three sailors as they lifted the innkeeper's body from the muddy dockwater and laid it on the cobbles.

"He drowned hisself," said another.

"Th'old fool was drunk an' fell off'en the bridge. Dead as old Moses," said the third.

They looked down at him awhile, three sailors to whom a drowned man was no new thing. Arm in arm, they went on their way, talking and laughing. When they had forced the lock of the inn door, liquor was free. They saw nothing of a swarthy bearded man who lay on the floor behind the door; and forgetful of how they had come to be there, they went after a while on their ways.

Save for a solitary night watchman, the docks were deserted. Roofs gleamed frostily when, with the old innkeeper over his shoulder, the night watchman came to the inn. The barroom lamp was out. By the light of matches he saw the bearded man on the floor.

"Some demnition furriner," said the night watchman to himself. "He must'a' found free liquor.

Leaving the old innkeeper beside the foreign man, he found liquor for himself, searching for it by match flares. The night was bitter cold.

Dawn was rimy when, having toasted

the two on the floor, the night watchman wiped his lips and rambled away to go to his lodging.

With broad daylight an outward bound sea captain and his mate came to the inn for a last drink, and found the two prone behind the barroom door, one stiff and the other in a stupor. And after a while the foreign man was carried away on a litter. The old innkeeper went down in the dirt and was forgotten. And later the foreign man's leg was cut off to save his life. They sawed it away, flesh and bone; and when he came to his senses afterward he cried over and over—

"Did ye see the *Teresa?*"

Nobody knew who he was or why he cried so wildly. And nobody cared.

FIVE years were gone by. The disheveled figure of a gray haired, black bearded, one legged man who hobbled about the water side at Avonmouth, just down river from Bristol, just a short sail up the coast from Bude haven, was familiar to coaster crews and to stevedores. Sometimes he would be drunk for days at a time. Sometimes he would sit all day, staring out to sea, as though looking for some expected sail to appear from down Bude haven way, some ship bound in from the windy Atlantic, from over toward Spain, or Portugal way maybe. Sometimes—and his voice was as the creak of rusted hinges—he whispered a question—

"Did ye see the *Teresa?*"

People said the old foreign man had once been a sea captain, and that he had been witless ever since he had had to have his leg cut off. Others laughed and said that his wits would be right enough were it not for the liquor. Everyone spoke of him as 'the cracked dago' and nobody knew who he was, and nobody cared.

A BRIG discharging the last of her cargo lay by the wharf at Avonmouth, on a dull morning of November. Up and down and to and fro about her half poop there paced impatiently a slenderly built sinewy man in his early thirties. His face was swarthy, his hair black as the wing of a crow. If ever the stevedores paused for a moment at their taking out the vessel's cargo he stopped his pacing and impatiently shouted to them to hurry along with their work. When all was going well, the cargo hoists rising and falling regularly, he now and again paused in his pacing and stared out to sea. Whether he paced to and fro, or shouted to the stevedores, or stared out to sea, there was in his face a nervous look, a look as though of dread in his coaly eyes.

"What's all the rush? What's all the hurry?" asked a sweating stevedore of the brig's mate, and the brig's mate shrugged his shoulders.

"He's been that way ever since we was coming up channel yesterday," answered the brig's mate. "From the time we sighted the coast off Bude haven he's been itchin' an' twitchin'. Never been on these here coasts most like, an' scared in strange waters."

"Watch him now," said the stevedore, "He's all right now, eh?"

"Aye," said the mate. "He's always right enough for as long as the brat wi' him."

From the companionway of the brig's cabin there had run a child of some five or six years. He was struggling now in the skipper's arms, trying to escape to the deck and run off on his play while the skipper held him tight and smothered his face with kisses.

"Queer how a dago kid'd have them blue eyes," said a stevedore.

Slipping out of the skipper's arms, the child ran from the poop to the main deck. While the stevedores muttered and swore because a child was permitted to run about among the cargo hoists and get into everybody's way, so that unloading was hindered, the skipper leaned carelessly on the poop rail and watched the little lad, yearning in his coaly eyes and a contented smile on his dark lips.

When a stevedore appealed to the mate, the mate only shrugged his shoulders and muttered:

"What if ye'd to go to sea wi' the young varmint? How'd ye like that?"

By and by the last of the cargo was out. While the mate and boss stevedore stood talking together, and the other stevedores were unreeving the cargo hoists, a passer called to the brig's skipper. As the skipper turned to reply, the child clambered over the hatch coaming and disappeared into the empty hold. While the mate walked forward and the skipper talked to the man on the wharf the stevedores put the hatches on, no one aware that the child was below in the dark hold.

"Where's the boy?" called the skipper to the mate, as the last of the stevedores went off along the wharf.

"He was here a minute back, Captain," said the mate.

With a haunted look in his coaly eyes, the skipper ran to the brig's bulwark and looked down to the muddy water. But in another moment he had run to the hatch and was shouting to the mate to come and help him get the hatches off. The mate scowled as the child climbed laughing out to the deck.

"We'll be away now in a half hour," said the skipper to the mate. "Have you got all the crew?"

"They're over the way at the inn," replied the mate.

While the mate went over the road to round up the sailors, the skipper lifted the child in his arms and went below to his cabin. A cold wind whistled through the brig's rigging, flecking muddy water beyond Avonmouth with quick white caps. Pausing at the companionway door, the skipper looked out to sea with a haunted light in his dark eyes.

Seated at the inn table, the sailors called to the mate to come take a last drink with them.

"Where's the other man?" asked the mate when he'd counted them over, and the sailors grinned and shook their heads.

Turning to the innkeeper, the mate asked where his other sailor was gone. The innkeeper said that it was none of his business to keep track of any sailor for any one, mate or skipper.

AN OLD drink sodden fellow with gray hair, a black beard and a peg leg stumped in from the street and, mumbling to the innkeeper, begged for a drink. When a mug was passed to him he emptied it in a long swallow. With a witless stare in his dark eyes he looked from one to another of the sailors.

"Did ye see the *Teresa?*" he asked.

The sailors laughed. With a wink at the mate one of them said:

"There's another man for you, sir. Davey must 'a' skipped out."

Leaning on the bar, the peg legged man mumbled to himself.

"It'd serve the skipper right," muttered the mate; and stepping to the bar, he laid a hand on the peg leg man's shoulder.

"D'ye want to go to sea in a good ship?" asked the mate.

The sailors laughed. One of them said:

"I was shipmates once wi' a peg leg man. All he was good for was to take wheel."

"Bring him aboard. Get along, now. We're going to sea," said the mate, and under his breath he said, "Serve the skipper right. Curse him an' his brat!"

Leaving his mate to get the brig away from moorings and out to the channel, the skipper sat in his cabin and watched the child at its play. When a cold gust of wind blew in at an open porthole he rose and closed the port, dread in his swarthy face as he looked for a moment to the wind tossed sea.

All day the peg leg man remained in a drunken sleep in his bunk. All day, till evening was drawing in, the skipper stayed below and kept the child with him. When he went at last to the deck he asked no question of the mate, but looked gloomily toward the dim high headlands of the frowning foreshore.

"Hurry her along, Mister! Hurry her along!" he said to the mate and, shivering as though an ague had him, returned below after only a few minutes on his poop.

Mist dripped from sails and spars.

Mists rolled unseen along the rocky coastline, over the tossing sea. Wind whined. Black surges swept shoreward from the wild Atlantic.

By and by the mate looked in on the skipper.

"The wind's freshening, sir," he said. "The night's thick as soup."

"Crowd her along, Mister!" said the skipper. "Get her away to sea." And when the mate was gone he knelt on the cabin deck, his swarthy cheek against the child's soft face, its little hands clasped in his strong fingers.

"Keep handy every one. The wind's shifty," said the mate, looking in at the forecastle door; and, wakened by his words, the peg leg man rose up in his bunk.

"Did he see the *Teresa*?" asked the peg leg man.

"He's crazy as flitter bats, sir," laughed a sailor.

"You!" said the mate, and gripped the old fellow by the shoulder. "What ye good for? Can ye steer?"

THE PEG leg man stood at the brig's wheel. Cold wind fanned his wrinkled face. The brig lifted and dipped to long invisible surges. A black night. No lights anywhere. A November night, bitter, wreathed in blankets of fog.

A sort of awakened intelligence was come to the black bearded helmsman's eyes. The compass light shone in his swarthy face. Presently his lips parted. He smiled, as though some pleasant thought had crossed his mind.

"Watch your steering there!" called the mate from the fore end of the poop.

"Sold when she fetches to Lisbon," murmured the black bearded helmsman.

"He'd ought to be on deck in this cursed weather," muttered the mate and, bending, looked down through the cabin skylight at the skipper below.

Raising the skylight a little, the mate called down to the skipper:

"Night's thick as soup, sir. Wind's shifty."

"Hurry her along, Mister! Get her away to sea," answered the skipper.

The mate closed the skylight.

"If she was mine I'd be at her wheel tonight," grumbled the mate, and going forward shouted to the sailors to get out and take a pull on the braces.

A squall struck the brig, heeling her far over, surging her through wild invisible seas.

With the child's little hand clasped in his fingers, the skipper raised his head and kneeling on the cabin deck listened to the noises of the night.

"Sold when she fetches to Lisbon," murmured the black bearded helmsman and, raising his eyes from the compass, peered into the darkness.

"Haul away!" shouted the mate to the sailors and, as the brig leaned over to the hard wind on her side, grumbled again, "If she was mine I'd be at her wheel tonight."

Whirling invisible fog wreaths shoreward before it, another squall struck the brig. Far off on the open Atlantic the light on an inbound vessel winked for a moment, and was gone.

"Fog's clearing a bit," said the mate to himself, and to the sailors he shouted, "Haul away, boys!"

Heartened by the mate's cheerier tone, the sailors lay back on the ropes, while, sensing the hard wind on his vessel's side, the skipper smiled and with a sigh of content bent over the child again.

"That's well!" called the mate to the sailors; he paused by the galley amidships and looked in on the cook.

"There's Bude haven light now," said the mate. He pointed to a light that winked a mile or so away to leeward.

His eager eyes upon the winking harbor light, a smile of deep content upon his wrinkled face, the black bearded helmsman put the helm up.

Hidden in fog, the light went out.

As, taking the wind astern, the brig gathered speed and raced toward the shore, the mate leapt with a cry of dismay from the galley. The sailors rushed shouting from the forecastle.

Sensing the suddenly altered motion of his vessel, the skipper sprang up and, leaping to the poop, rushed for the helm.

A flash of lightning illumined the night. Astern, great fog banks drove in from the open Atlantic. Ahead a high cliff loomed for one flame lit instant above a fog hid foreshore. The brig raced toward the foreshore.

Drowning the cries of mate and sailors, thunder rumbled above the mastheads.

With a wandering witless look come to his wrinkled face, the black bearded helmsman stepped from the wheel; leaving the brig, her sails immediately caught all aback, helpless and in irons on a lee shore.

In a sudden lull, from utter darkness, while an onrushing squall screamed in the night astern, while the skipper stood petrified, his coaly eyes ghastly in the compass light, a wavering voice rose over the moan of the sea.

"Did ye see the *Teresa?*"

MORNING broke bright and clear, the fury of the night bygone. Men seated in the haven inn talked of blows that had been in bygone Novembers, of gales that had roared along the shores by Bude; of swirling tides that, hurrying along the cliffs, left seldom any flotsam upflung upon their rock ledges.

Ike Harper and Dirty Shirt Jones return in a hilarious story of the Christmas Season

DIRTY SHIRT JONES and Scenery Sims got religion. That in itself ain't of much interest, unless you knew these two. I've knowed lots of men who got religion jist like Dirty Shirt and Scenery got it. Remorse, that's what she was—not religion. Too much liquor on an empty stummick. I've felt the error of my ways from the same cause.

Dirty Shirt Jones wasn't very big. His face was kinda antegodlin', and one eye sorta roamed around indefinite-like usually comin' to rest with the pupil lookin' down the length of his nose, as though amazed at the crookedness of said organ. Dirty Shirt had some quaint ideas of humor, and as far back as I can remember, he's harbored a deadly hatred against the towns of Yaller Horse and Paradise. Bein' a loyal Piperocker he couldn't do otherwise.

Scenery Sims is smaller than Dirty Shirt. He's a hard little devil, this here Scenery Sims, almost bald, square above the ears, with eyes like a pair of faded shoe buttons, one flarin' ear—and a sense of loyalty to Piperock.

It's December in Piperock. There's only one tree between Piperock and the North Pole, which don't noways temper the wind to the shorn lamb. Piperock

The CATSPAW of PIPEROCK

By W. C. TUTTLE

ain't no metropolis—but, gentlemen, she's a town. We sink or swim, live or die, survive or perish together. As Magpie Simpkins says, "We're one and indigestible."

Me and Dirty Shirt have been tryin' to wrest some wealth from the bosom of Mother Nature on the headwaters of Plenty Stone Creek, but the weather drove us back to the fleshpots, where we're doomed to spend the rest of the winter. I've been spendin' two days against a stove, tryin' to git some heat inside my frozen carcass. When I does pilgrim uptown, I finds old Dirty Shirt settin' on the sidewalk in front of Buck Masterson's saloon. He's humped up there, with his old mackinaw collar above his ears, hands shoved down inside his old yaller angora chaps, settin' there in the snow, the thermometer below zero—and right behind him is the saloon, where boot heels are sizzlin' against the old base burner, and water gittin' hot for the next round of drinks.

MAGPIE had told me that Dirty and Scenery were paralyzed drunk the day before, and I had a hunch that Dirty had froze to death. But he wasn't dead. His active eye does a few loops, steadies

down to a strained contemplation of that crooked nose, and he says to me—

"The way of the transgressor is pretty damn' tough, Ike Harper."

"All depends on how heavy your underclothes are," says I. "How about a shot of hot liquor?"

"Strong drink is ragin', Ike."

"So's the thermometer."

"I'm repentin' of my sins."

"Well, you've shore got a long hard season ahead of you, Dirty Shirt. Where does it hurt you worst? You ain't done got religion, have you?"

"My sins are heavy among me, Ike. I've shot and slashed and cut and cussed pretty much all m' life."

"Not countin' horse and cattle stealin', card markin' and other forms of malignant sins," I reminds him. "But freezin' to death ain't goin' to wipe 'em out none to speak about. Why not try goin' to the penitentiary for life?"

"Wouldn't pay me out, Ike; I'm half through livin' right now. Me and Scenery got it together. He's repentin' in sackcloth and ashes right now."

"Yea-a-ah—but I'll bet he ain't sucker enough to freeze along with 'em."

"Old Testament Tilton told us—"

"You ain't takin' his word for it, are you, Dirty?"

"He's our preacher, ain't he? Me and Scenery went to church."

"How in hell did anybody ever git you two in church?"

Dirty's eye wobbles a lot, but pretty soon she jerks back to attention.

"They ain't got no bell," he says kinda sad-like. "No bell on the church. Don'tcha know it's a shame—no bell on the church. Fact of the matter is, it don't look like no church. It's a shame for a place to not even look like a church. I tell you I'm goin' to do somethin' for that church. I'm goin' to fix her up so she'll look and sound like a church."

"What'll you use for money?" I asks.

"I'll sell my horseless carriage to the highest bidder."

I laughs through my chatterin' teeth.

"Scenery might sell his camel," says I, merely as a suggestion.

That camel was always a sore spot with Dirty Shirt. Him and Scenery owned a placer mine back on Dog Town Creek, and they cleaned up about fifteen hundred dollars, before the little pay streak played out. Durin' that time, Dirty discovered a streak of pretty good lookin' quartz, and him and Scenery decides to work it. They needed machinery; so Scenery takes his share of the money and heads for Butte to buy the machinery.

In about a week he shows up, half drunk, leadin' a moth eaten camel. It seems that he got drunk in Butte, got in an argument with a feller over how long a camel could go without drinkin', bought a camel from a travelin' carnival and came back to prove he was right.

Naturally, Dirty Shirt got awful mad. He busted up his partnership with poor Scenery, bought Scenery out for fifty dollars, and went to Butte himself to get the machinery. And then he came back, trailin' an old automobile behind a pair of misbegotten mules. He had got drunk, bought six hundred dollars' worth of chances on a raffle—and won the danged thing.

It was the second automobile to ever come to Piperock, and a vigilance committee waited on Dirty Shirt right away; so Dirty stored it in the Piperock Livery Stable, where it couldn't scare anythin'. Scenery kept his camel out at his shack, and put a warnin' on the gate, which read:

BEWAIR THE CAMUEL
THE DAMN THING
BIGHTS.

Scenery called it Araby. The danged thing smelt like a street in Frisco Chinatown, and it would bite. Acted most of the time as though it had a bad bellyache. The vigilance committee also warned Scenery to keep his menagerie off the main roads, 'cause every bronc that saw it throwed a fit and its rider at the same time.

Anyway, Dirty Shirt wouldn't come in out of the cold; so I left him there and went into Buck's place, where I finds Magpie Simpkins, Buck Masterson, Wick Smith and Old Testament Tilton, all settin' around the old stove. While Old Testament is our minister, he's broad minded, six feet six inches tall, and no man ever had a more "if I die right now you won't hear a squawk out of me" expression on his face. Accordin' to him, there ain't no livin' man knows more about hell. Magpie says Old Testament will prob'ly git a job as a guide down there, after he's dead.

MAGPIE SIMPKINS is and has been my pardner for years. He's as tall as Testament, wears a flowin' mustache, and is a livin' example of a man who never did mind his own business. He thinks his mission in life is to elevate humanity. His brain is filled with wonderful ideas, but each and every one is shy some sort of a dingus that makes 'em tick. But he'll back any of his ideas with a six-gun or a neck yoke, when all else fails.

Wick Smith is a retired killer. He still retains the disposition, plus a walrus mustache and some bunions. He runs the Piperock Merchandise Company, and agrees with his wife, who scales two hundred and sixty. Buck Masterson was suspected of many things, before he settled down to runnin' a saloon. He ain't so tall, but he's got plenty waist, big shoulders and skinny legs. On the Fourth of July he wears a collar, and on Christmas he adds a necktie to same.

Them four pelicans is plannin' somethin', I can see that right away; so I backed out and went home. I'm scared of them fellers, and when they git to plannin' anythin' I want to be outside their plans. Magpie didn't say nothin' when he came home, but he's got somethin' on his mind, and I seen him sneakin' a few peeks at a little black book.

"Whatcha got there?" I asks, but he don't answer.

But I sneaked it out of his overalls pocket that night, and it's a Bible. I've knowed Magpie to have most everything else, but this is his first time to pack a Bible. I didn't say anythin', but I got all set to listen to mornin' prayers. Mebbe he wasn't that far gone, 'cause he didn't pray, but he did mention that fact that Dirty Shirt Jones had turned over a new leaf and bid fair to become a valuable citizen of Piperock.

It was the followin' mornin' after that, when I went up to Buck's place. I knowed I had twenty dollars in my pocket; so I invited those present to partake with me, which they did with cold weather alacrity, as you might say. Magpie was one of the elect. But when I dug deep for my twenty, my gropin' hand encounters a lot of hunks of cardboard.

I took out a handful and looked 'em over. They're about two inches square, with a pen and ink number on one side, and on the other is written:

Good for one chance.

I dug once more, but there ain't no money in my pocket. Buck looks at me kinda dumb-like, and I says softly—

"Charge this up to me, Buck—until after the funeral."

"No hurry," says he.

I counted them tickets, and I've got twenty. Magpie smoothes his mustache and watches me in the back bar mirror. Then he clears his throat and says—

"It'll be somethin' we'll all date time from, gents."

"To me," says I, "it'll be jist a justified killin', you long geared pickpocket. You took that twenty out of my pocket and put in them numbered cards."

"Blessed be the meek," says Old Testament.

"Meek be damned! I want my money. What are these chances on, anyway?"

"Scenery Sims' autymobile," says Buck. "It cost a thousand, new. If you can win it for twenty dollars—"

I blowed right up, but Wick Smith cramped my gun hand and tried to explain:

"It's to build a new church and buy a bell. It means advancement for Piperock. Here's Old Testament, grown as gray as a jackrabbit, tryin' to chase the devil away from us. He's been a long laborer in the vineyard of the Lord, and we've got to show our appreciation. Our church don't look like a church. There ain't no bell. Your twenty will do more good where it is right now than over Buck's bar."

"You don't need to git so damn' enthusiastic," growled Buck. "I've gotta live, ain't I?"

"That's all fine," says I, "but I don't never go to church. I'm master of my own soul, and I don't need no sky pilotin'. I wouldn't give twenty dollars to that church, even if they'd give me Testament's hide and taller as a bonus. And that was the only twenty dollars I had left."

"It is better to give than to receive," says Testament. "Just remember that Dirty Shirt is donatin' that autymobile, free gratis for nothin'. There's a lot of tickets bein' sold in Paradise and Yaller Horse, and the grand drawin' is to be held at the Mint Hall on Christmas Eve. We're goin' to give the best entertainment that's ever been given in this country."

"I don't care," says I. "I won't be here."

"You'll be here," says Magpie. "As one of the local donators, you'll be here to see that it's a success."

I WALKED out of there and went down to Dirty's shack, where I found Dirty and Scenery. They've got a bottle and a warm fire.

"How's religion?" I asks, as I imbibes about the full of a mule's ear.

"To'able," says Scenery. "Day after t'morrow is Christmas, usually spelled with an X. Know why they spell it thataway, Ike? The X marks where the body fell. Me and Dirty Shirt are gettin' organized."

"I thought you fellers had religion."

"We did have," nods Dirty.

"Oh, we need a reg'lar church," says Scenery. "We need one that you can see and recognize. That danged church we've got now looks like a saloon. I'll leave it to you, if it don't. We need one with a belfry."

"We do," agrees Dirty. "Oh, we shore do. The present one is a shame and a disgrace. I'm doin' my part, ain't I? They're rafflin' off my autymobile."

"Will the danged thing run?" I asks.

"Shore will. It's got gas'line in her, and all you've got to do is twist the crank. Run? My Gawd, that thing'll rear right up and paw the sky. Stands me five hundred on the hoof right now. They're goin' to put planks on the Mint Hall stairs and run her into the hall, where all may gaze upon same."

"And I've donated Araby," says Scenery, grabbin' for the bottle.

"They ain't goin' to raffle that thing, are they?"

"They shore ain't! Raffle Araby? Huh! Nossir, they ain't. I dunno what they want Araby for, but I've done made the loan to Magpie and Testament. I reckon the camule is part of the entertainment. I hope he don't eat an arm off somebody—unless they're from Yaller Horse or Paradise."

I STAYED all night with them two public spirited men, and the next day I'm so filled with remorse that I almost got religion. Along about midnight Dirty went out to git some wood, forgot to shut the door, when he came back, and when I woke up in the mornin' I had one frozen ear.

I asked Magpie what the performance was to be, and he asked me if I knew what Christmas was all about. I said it was a time when folks traded shirts, as far as I could understand. He said for me to attend, and I'd learn what it was about. I told him I thought I would, bein' as it had already cost me twenty dollars. I went down to Paradise that afternoon, and almost froze my other ear.

Paradise town is about the same size as Piperock, but if all their morals were laid end to end you'd have to use calipers and a magnifyin' glass to measure 'em.

I finds Tombstone Todd, Hair Oil Heppner and Hip Shot Harris over from Yaller Horse, and if there ever was an unholy trinity, these are it. Tombstone tries to question me a lot about our festivities, but I don't respond very much, 'cause I don't know enough about it myself.

"Peace on earth!" snorts Hip Shot. "Good will toward men! Does that mean men from Piperock? I'd crave to know about it, that's what I'd crave?"

"It means *men*," says Hair Oil. "That natcherally cuts out critters from Piperock. I heard the same thing, Hip Shot. Magpie Simpkins and his misguided cohorts aim to kinda soft soap us fellers. I know him of old. His dove of peace usually turns out to be a chicken hawk. I won't go up there at no danged Christmas time."

"Piperock will be glad about that," says I. "They sent me down here to find out how many of you ain't comin'. I'll mark Hair Oil off my list."

"Mark me off, too," says Hip Shot.

"You're off. How about you, Tombstone?"

"I'm comin'. Like a danged fool I bought ten tickets on that raffle, and I attends to see that no skulduggery is practiced."

"If you ain't there, your tickets ain't legal."

"Mark me back on," says Hair Oil and Hip Shot together.

"There's bound to be skulduggery," adds Hair Oil. "I p'tects my dollar."

Over at Hank Padden's saloon I finds 'em playin' poker, usin' tickets as legal tender, and only bein' discounted fifty per cent. I got into that game and lost nineteen tickets on the first jackpot. I'd have lost twenty, but I'd misplaced one of 'em, and didn't find it until I was halfway home. Old Tombstone Todd won 'em all from me.

Paradise has always wanted that automobile, and as far as I can see, most of the town are comin' up to our shindig. Paradise can't get along together well enough to ever pull off a celebration; so they've got to git outside their own limits, if they ever want entertainment.

I DIDN'T go uptown that evenin', but stayed at our shack. Magpie wasn't at home, and I knew he was as busy as a rat-tail bronc in fly time. He's always the movin' spirit in Piperock, and up to the present time, I'm the sacrificial goat that you read about in the Bible. But not this time. For once in his life Ike Harper, Esquire, is goin' to set back and let somebody else be the burnt offerin'.

About nine o'clock that night Dirty Shirt comes down to my cabin.

"Do you want to re'lize on them tickets you got, Ike?" he asks. "We've plumb run out of cardboard, and the market is good in Paradise. I can git you jist what you paid."

"I'll ride on what I've got," says I, kickin' myself for that poker game. "I may win that machine myself."

"Don't be a danged fool, Ike. It ain't got no brakes. Why, the whole thing is loose. Anyway, you can't run it around here. Let Paradise or Yaller Horse have it. They won't live long enough to enjoy it much."

Then I told him about the poker game. I'd found the other ticket, but one ticket wasn't worth botherin' about.

"You're the only person in Piperock who has a ticket; so I reckon the town is safe for democracy. We've done collected enough to build the new church, and the admission fees will hang a bell on her."

"Why are you and Scenery Sims so interested in havin' a new church?"

"The other one is a disgrace, Ike; it looks like a saloon. Well, I've got to go back and rehearse."

"Rehearse?"

"Shore. I'm one of the Three Wise Men."

"Who'r the other two?"

"Magpie and Tellurium Woods."

"Yeah, you better go back and rehearse, Dirty Shirt. You three jiggers will shore need a lot of rehearsin' for a job like that."

"The Cross J quartette will sing. And Bill Thatcher's orchestry will render plenty."

"Well, that isn't anythin' to git excited about. There's a lot of things I'd rather hear than Telescope Tolliver, Muley Bowles, Chuck Warner and Henry Clay Peck singin'. They're awful, but they ain't as bad as Thatcher's orchestra, accordion, bull fiddle and a jew's-harp, playin' 'Sweet Marie'. I ain't finicky about m' music either."

"The rest of it'll be good, Ike. It's a specktickle. Livin' pitchers, as you might say. Well, I've got to go back. We're puttin' the autymobile up into the Mint Hall, and we've got to cut out the side of the wall at the top of the stairs. We'll elevate the machine up on a couple saw horses, where everybody can look her over. Goin' to run her up on planks, with a block and fall."

It shore was a good lookin' machine, all fancy with shiny paint and brass dinguses. We never had but one other machine in Piperock, and somebody put dynamite under that one. Yaller Rock County is a horse country.

I don't reckon that machine would do very well in Paradise. But them Paradise and Yaller Horse folks will buy raffle chances on anythin'. They are so danged crooked themselves that they think Piperock is goin' to pull a crooked deal on the raffle. And me with the only ticket in Piperock! I don't know what the odds are against me, but if they've already got enough money to build the new church, them Paradisers and Yaller Horses has shore dug deep in the old sock. But it's all right with me—I'm lookin' for competition. I don't want the danged machine. I've got a horse and a burro, and that's plenty rollin' stock for one man in my position. I ain't even goin' to the entertainment. I'm goin' to stand Buck off for a couple quarts and spend a quiet evenin' beside my own fire.

WELL, I got the couple quarts all right, and I packed plenty wood into the old shack for the evenin'. Then I put my gun on the table beside me, declared plenty peace on earth, good will toward all men, and settled down to enjoy life. Once in a while I can hear a few shots fired uptown, but nothin' to speak about. Christmas is usually quiet thataway, and mostly always it's so danged bitter cold that it freezes up the grease in a six-gun so badly that you can't shoot it outdoors. Most of our killin's are done indoors durin' the winter months.

I'm setting there by the fire, kinda dreamin', when all to once the door flies open and there is Magpie and Tellurium.

"Merry Christmas," says Tellurium. "Git on your hat, Ike."

"I don't wear no hat in the house," says I, reachin' for my gun, but Magpie beat me to it. Without that gun, I'm outnumbered.

"Here's the whole thing in a nutshell, Ike," says Magpie. "Wick Smith fell down the chimbley durin' rehearsal a while ago, and he busted his collarbone. You're the only man who can take his place on short notice. Git your hat."

"Nothin' less than murder will git me up in that hall," says I. "Right now I'm filled with the milk of human kindness, but don't agitate me. All I crave is to be left alone."

Well, they both talked with me plenty, and like a fool I let 'em lead me uptown. I don't know what they want of me, but what chance have I got against two men, both bigger 'n I am, and three guns? If Wick Smith, sober, fell down and busted his collarbone, what'll happen to me? Gravity is somethin' I ain't never found out how to defy, and if there's any rubber in my system, it shore crawls to the upper side every time I fall off anythin'. I pleads a plenty, but it falls on deaf ears; so I resigns myself to fate, reservin' the right to kill both of 'em as soon as I git around to an even break.

They leads me up to the Mint Hall, where everybody in the world is congre-

gated, and takes me around to the rear of the big platform, across the front of which is stretched a big black curtain. They've shore cut a big hole in the side of the wall to git that autymobile through, and there she sets on a couple saw horses and some heavy planks. They've got the old hall decorated with green branches, and the orchestra is already murderin' "Sweet Marie", playin' it in jig time. After while they'll play it for a march, play it for the openin' hymn, and then change the time for the first waltz. I looks over the assemblage with fear and tremblin'. There ain't a paid murderer in the whole gang— They do their stuff for nothin'.

"Thank Gawd, there ain't no Piperocker ownin' any tickets on that raffle," says Magpie. "If Paradise or Yaller Horse don't win that autymobile, it's 'cause they've lost the right ticket."

I reckon Dirty Shirt has told Magpie about me losin' mine in that poker game— that is, all except one. I'm wonderin' if tney know the money is to be used to uplift Piperock. Prob'ly not. There ain't no church in Paradise or Yaller Horse, and if they thought for a minute that Piperock was goin' to have somethin' they ain't got, they'd never bought them chances.

WE CLIMBED in at the back of that big platform, and I fell over a ladder. There was more danged carpenter stuff around, and it seemed as though most everybody in Piperock was in there.

"Oh, I'm glad you came, Ike," says Mrs. Smith. "Poor Wickie had a ter'ble fall."

"You'll do fine in his place," says Mrs. Dugout Dulin, who is six feet six inches tall, and will weigh about a hundred and ten. They ain't got no bath tub in their house—they use a shotgun barrel.

I'm too full of Christmas cheer to pay much attention, and like a fool I let 'em dress me in a buffalo robe coat, string me with sleigh bells, and try to tell me all about it at the same time.

"No time to rehearse," pants Magpie, cinchin' up my belt. "Anyway, you'll know what to do, Ike. That's fine! Where's the whiskers?"

There's an apparition holdin' the lantern, and it gradually dawns on me that this is Dirty Shirt. He's got a white cloth wound around his head, and his figure is draped with one of Mrs. Smith's front room curtains. And there's old Tellurium Woods, naked to the waist, with a homemade horsehair wig on his bald head. From his waistline to his boot tops he's wearin' a Navaho rug. I begin to see things a little plainer, and my eyes focus on somethin' that's hangin' from the ceilin'.

"Whazzat?" I asks.

"That," says Dirty Shirt, "is the star of—of—where was it, Tellurium?"

"I dunno the exact location. Pete Gonyer made it for us. Iron star, with a glass front. Put a candle in her, and she looks like somethin'."

They started to tell me more about it, but jist about that time Magpie and Scenery hooks some sort of a doodad around my chin, ties it off tight in a few places, and I looks down at about three feet of chin whiskers. They kinda shoot out from jist below my lower lip like a waterfall, and they shore smell awful horsey.

"There!" says Magpie. "You look more like Santa Claus than Wick did."

I try to say somethin', but I'm whisker bound. I talk through my nose, but I can't even understand what I'm sayin'. Magpie explains what I've got to do. They've got a chimbley all built. It's about ten feet tall, and about three feet square. At the bottom is what looks kinda like a fireplace.

"Here's your chore," says Magpie. "You climb that ladder to the top of the chimbley. There's a ladder built inside for you to come down. Your act is the last on the bill. Up to that time, your chimbley is part of the stable. When we git everythin' cleared after the next to the last act, we make this up to look like a room in the house. Mrs. Smith will

recite a poem entitled 'It Was The Night Before Christmas', and while she's recitin', you come down the chimbley. There'll be a Christmas tree, and you'll have some doojinguses to hang on it, while she speaks. And that's about all. We aims to show the folks jist why Christmas started; *sabe?* Kinda show the modern way of celebratin', jist as a—a extra act, as you might say. Mebbe you better git up there jist before the show starts; so as to be all set. Now, I've got to see that the raffle is all pulled off right."

I got up out of that chair, kinda gropin' in the dark. I wanted to git that horse's tail off my chin, so I could talk a little, but that heavy coat and all them sets of sleigh bells prevents me from liftin' my arms. I'm jinglin' around, grabbin' for somethin' or somebody to support me, when all to once, somethin' grabbed me by the whiskers and gave an awful yank.

It knocked my feet from under me, but I didn't fall down, 'cause I was still suspended by the whiskers, and I looked up at the flarin' nose of Araby, the Scenery Sims camel. The damn' thing has got me by the whiskers, kinda holdin' me up at arm's length, as it were. And then the blamed thing began to swing me around. My neck is jist about to break, when all to once the toggle busts, and I went end over end out through the black curtain, hit the edge of the platform on the seat of my pants, where I ricochetted straight out and landed with both legs around Bill Thatcher's neck.

There's a lot of yellin', but it don't mean much to me and Bill and his bull fiddle. Willin' hands separated us, and somebody hauled me back onto the platform, where they yanked me back behind the curtain.

"I'm through Santa Clausin'," says I. "No damn' camel is goin' to use me for a sling shot."

"Swaller your gorge," says Magpie. "You ain't hurt."

"You take that camel home, or I won't play with you."

"We've got to have that camel, Ike."

There's so much yellin' out in front that you can't hear anythin'.

"C'mon with that raffle!"

"Throw Ike out again!"

"Start your show, before we freeze to death!"

Old Judge Steele and Old Testament Tilton went out on the platform. The judge has a sawed off shotgun and Testament has a Bible.

"Peace!" says Testament, holdin' up his right hand.

"Or-r-rder in the house!" snaps the judge, and cocks both barrels.

"We'll open with a prayer," says Testament.

"Show your openers," snorts Tombstone Todd. "And what's a lot more, we never came up here to listen to prayers. If you've got any prayers to offer, go behind that curtain and offer 'em to Piperock. Ain't that right, folks?"

"Yea verily," says Dog Rib Davidson, of Yaller Horse, standin' up. "I'd like to say a few words. I've got ten tickets on that raffle—"

"I've got eighty!" snaps Tombstone. "Set down, Dog Rib. I've done promised Mrs. Todd that autymobile."

"You've got a lot of nerve," growls Hank Padden. "Better wait'll you win it."

MAGPIE went out on the platform. He's got a basket with all the numbers in it.

"We'll pull off the raffle, Testament," he says. "No use prayin' to or for that bunch of horsethieves. No use wastin' your breath, 'cause the Lord would discount anythin' you could say good about 'em, anyway.

"I've got all the numbers in this basket, folks. I'll select somebody to draw a number, which will designate the winner. Judge, will you do the drawin'?"

"Not for mine, he don't!" yelps Tombstone. "Not for mine. You've got to deal off the top of the deck to us this time, Magpie. I suggests that my wife draw the number."

That seemed to suit everybody; so

Mrs. Todd waddled up and drew out a number.

It was number eighteen, and you never seen such a scramble to look over tickets. One after another, I hear 'em cussin' their luck. Tombstone and his wife are talkin' their numbers out loud, and they ain't hittin' nowhere near the right number. The room is kinda still after the countin' is all doné, and when Testament clears his throat, it sounds like somebody tearin' a horse blanket.

"Who has the lucky number?" he asks. "Who has eighteen?"

Nobody speaks, and I suddenly realize that I've got that number in my pocket. It's the one I couldn't find when I was in that poker game. I manage to unhook that big coat, and I got the ticket out. It's number eighteen.

I stepped out on the platform and handed it to Testament, who squints at it over his glasses.

"Ike Harper wins," he says.

The crowd is kinda dumb over it all. Magpie grabs me by the arm and hustles me back through the curtain.

"I've won me a horseless carriage," says I. "One ticket was all I had."

"Jist enough to start a killin'," says Magpie. "Why didn't you keep that ticket out of sight. Now, they'll swear it was a brace game, and instead of peace on earth, it'll be pieces of Piperock scattered over the earth. Scenery, git Testament off the platform, and let's start the show before they git time to start anythin'. Ike, you danged fool, we swore to Paradise that there wasn't a ticket held in Piperock. That's why they spent all their money. Somebody git that quartette to sing. Dirty Shirt, you do it. Tell Muley Bowles to start it. Where's your whiskers, Ike?"

"The camel done et 'em."

"Hell! Well, you'll have to be Santa Claus without the whiskers. No way out of it now. Somebody light the star, will you, Scenery. Will you git Araby set for this scene? Everybody clear off the stage, except Araby and the Three Wise Men. There they go!"

"Ho-oh-lee-e-e-e ni-i-i-i-ight," wails the quartette.

Blunk!

"Si-eye-lent ni-i-i-i-ight," wails the trio.

Whap!

"In the good old sum-mer-r-r-r ti-i-ime," sings the duet, and then quits.

"Who hit Telescope and Henry Peck?" asks Muley, who sings tenor.

Comes the click of a gun, and then Tombstone Todd's voice:

"I did! Whatcha goin' to do about it, you hunk of leaf lard?"

"I'm goin' to do the best I can without 'em, Tombstone."

"That's the spirit," says Judge Steele. "And I want to warn all of you; this gun scatters pretty bad at fifty feet, but as far as that's concerned, I don't expect to hit any *innocent* folks, no matter who I shoot at."

"We've been lied to," wails Dog Rib. "They told me that nobody in Piperock owned any chances. I tell you, we've been gypped. It don't stand to reason that one lone ticket—"

"Don'tcha worry, Dog Rib," says Tombstone. "This ain't over yet. The Todd fambly never quits. I had eighty tickets, and any old time I spend eighty dollars, I hang around pretty close."

"You ain't got no more right to it than I have. Numbers don't—"

"LADIES and gentlemen, the show is about to begin," says the judge. "As far as Piperock is concerned, the raffle was on the square, and Ike Harper wins."

Old Testament steps outside the curtain.

"The first scene," says he, "is the Three Wise Men in the desert. They see the star of Bethlehem, which is brighter than all the stars. It is so bright that it leads them on. And so they arise and foller the star."

"Do they ever ketch it?" asks somebody.

But jist then the curtain is drawed back, showing Magpie Simpkins, Tellurium Woods and Dirty Shirt Jones

standin' in single file, with Araby back of 'em. And there's the iron star, with the candle inside it, hanging up in front of a black cloth.

"And the Wise Men saw the star," says Old Testament piously. "And they—"

"*Um-m-m-m-m--a-a-a-a-ahhhh-oo-o-o-o--o-a-a-a-ah!*" grunts Araby.

"And they looked and were much amazed, and they—"

"*Hoo-o-o-o-o-a-a-a-a-aw-w-w-w-oo-o-o-o-o-a-a-a-ah!*"

"Shut up, you moth eaten, hump backed old bum!" snorts Dirty Shirt.

"*A-a-a-a-a-a-ah-a-a-a-a-a-aw-hoo-o-o-o-o-oah!*"

Araby's voice was almost a wail now. I feel shore that he ate and swallered my whiskers, and it's done give him a belly-ache.

"And they were much amazed," repeated Testament, tryin' to make himself heard.

"*Wah-hoo-o-o-o-o-o!*" wails Araby.

"They shore sound amazed!" yells somebody in the audience.

"Who in hell said I didn't win?" yells Tombstone. "That wasn't eighteen at all—it was eighty-one. I've got her right here, boys. My wife's drawed my number! Here she is! By grab, I win that prize! Yah-hoo-o-o-o-o-o! Ike Harper never won nothin', the bow legged sheepherder!"

Well, I never let none of that gang call me names, even when I'm sober; so I steps right out on that platform, with all my bells ringin', and I grabbed the shotgun out of the judge's hands.

"Who's a bow legged sheepherder ,you cross between a tarantler and a polecat?" I yelps.

The only light in the place is that big iron star; and that's behind me, so I didn't know where to shoot—but they did.

Wham! A bullet fanned my ear, and down came the star—*ker-plank!*

I ducked down and rolled in behind a corner of the curtain.

"My Gawd!" says an awed voice in the audience. "You shot his head off, Tombstone; I heard it hit the floor!"

Somebody yanked the curtains, and they began turnin' on the lamps. Magpie took the shotgun away from me and shoved me into a corner.

"This is one of the best shows I ever did see," declares Hair Oil Heppner. "Two singers done got knocked out, one bull fiddle busted, and a Piperocker minus his head—and this is only the first act."

"I've won that prize," declared Tombstone. "Jist somebody try to stop me from claimin' it. Eighty-one wins."

"I've got ten tickets," says Dog Rib. "If eighteen was the number, I've got as much right to have it as you have, Tombstone. I'm from Yaller Horse the same as you and I—"

"You're *from* Yaller Horse," admits Tombstone, "but if you don't shut up, you won't never go back there, Dog Rib."

Dog Rib is settin' right behind Tombstone. Comes a dull thud, a sort of a scramblin' noise, and then Mrs. Todd's voice:

"Git up and take to him, Tombstone. Git up, can'tcha? He hit you with a boot. Did he hurt you, honey?"

"Honey's in the comb," says Hair Oil. "You shore do lift and drop a wicked boot, Dog Rib. But you ort to have removed the spur. Common etikette will tell you that it ain't ethical to pet a man over the head with a loose boot and not remove the spur first. I'll betcha he'll part his hair in the middle for a long time to come. Well, the show gits better as we go along, don't it, folks?"

"The danged murderer's got some of Tombstone's tickets!" wails Mrs. Todd.

"You had that boot off all the time, didn't you?" asked Hank Padden.

"Shore did. How'd you know it?"

"You wouldn't appreciate my reply, 'cause you live with 'em all the time. Well, let's go on with the show. What's holdin' us back? I paid four bits to see a show, and all I've seen yet is small arguments. If all we're goin' to do is fight—let's build up a good one, and then go home."

Magpie hauled me off the floor and led me back, where they're fixin' up that stable scene.

"They're about to do battle out there," says I.

"That's fine. If they fight among themselves, they won't have time to start trouble with us. Climb right up the ladder, Ike. I'll tell you when to come down, but it won't be until the next act."

I STARTED to climb up the ladder, when all at once I seen the rear end of an old red steer below me. The lower part of my chimbley is fixed up like a stall, and they've got a mean lookin' old steer, with jist his head showin'. The rear end is in the clear, but his head is locked tight. On the other side of the scene is that danged whisker eatin' camel, also caught by the head. They've got lanterns to light this scene. I'm pretty sore and stiff, but I climbs up my ladder and sets down on the edge of my chimbley. Anyway, I'm too high up for anybody to bother me, which ain't such a bad position, but I didn't realize that I stuck up above the top of the curtain.

Out in front, they're still quarrelin', but I ain't interested. I've made up my mind to buy Dog Rib a drink for hittin' Tombstone Todd. That old steer kinda starts weavin' back and forth, tryin' to git his head out, and I'm doin' a balancin' act on the top of that chimbley.

"You better calm that cow down there," says I. "I'm no damn' canary."

"So-o-o-o, boss," says Magpie. "Somebody git behind that damn' steer with a hunk of two by four, will you? Go out and explain this part of the show to them ignorant sheepherders, will you, Testament. They won't know what it's all about, unless you diagram it for 'em."

"Go ahead with your prep'rations," says Dugout Dulin. "I'll calm this steer. Whoa, you bald faced hunk of rawhide. Stop weavin' or I'll knock your rear end out of line with your ears. How're you comin', Ike?"

"Feet first, if I have m' choice," says I, hangin' on tight.

Testament Tilton's voice comes to my ears, and he's shore exortin' somethin' about somebody bein' born in a manger, and the wise men bringin' gifts.

"That part of it's all right," says Mrs. Todd, "but that don't help Tombstone none. He's done recited all his mul-pi-cation tables, and that damn' Dog Rib Davidson done stole over half of his tickets. Ain't there no law in this place? I've been a lady all through these proceedin's, but I'm shore goin' to forget m' bringin' up. Git up, honey, and poke him in the nose."

"Little mul-pi-cation won't hurt him none," says Dog Rib. "He don't know eighteen from eighty-one. He may be honey to you, but he's shore horseradish to me, ma'am."

"There ain't no law against hittin' a man with a boot, is there, Judge?" asks Hair Oil.

"Not specific, Hair Oil. It may be a breach of etikette."

"When he wakes up, he'll kill somebody," says Mrs. Todd.

"Not with his own gun," chuckles Dog Rib, " 'cause I've got it."

"He'll run you out of Yaller Horse, you sneakin' thief."

"Tootms two is eight," says Tombstone. "Tootms three is—is—"

"Eighteen," says Dog Rib. "Let's go ahead with the show."

"I came out here to explain the scene to you," says Testament. "Unless you understand what it all means, you won't know what it's about. In this scene, we aim to depict and duplicate a scene—"

"What happened to me?" chirps Tombstone, holdin' his head in both hands. "Where'd all this blood come from? I crave to know who hit me, that's what I'd crave?"

"Dog Rib hit you, honey," says Mrs. Todd. "He stole your tickets and your gun."

"I'll git your ears for this, Dog Rib!"

"You'll need 'em to replace the ones I got from you. While you're at it, you

might as well stock up on other parts of m' anatomy, 'cause when I'm through with you, you'll need plenty fixin', Tombstone."

"Did he git number eighty-one?" asks Tombstone of his wife.

"If I didn't, I'm shore cockeyed," laughs Dog Rib. "Folks, I've shore pulled the fangs out of this old sidewinder. He's bossed Yaller Horse jist as long as he's goin' to. From now on, Dog Rib Davidson is—

Dog Rib is standin' up to make his proclamation, when Telescope Tolliver, barytone of the Cross J quartette, flung a chair halfway across the room at Tombstone, and hit Dog Rib right on the head. Dog Rib shudders, folds up like a hat rack and disappears behind Tombstone Todd's chair.

"Si-eye-lent ni-i-i-i-ight," sings Telescope, startin' in where he left off when Tombstone knocked him out.

"Set down!" snorts Muley Bowles. "We're three murders and a homicide past that song, Telescope. Set down, before somebody kills you. This here peace on earth stuff means to keep down and protect your own head."

"And Tombstone Todd still bosses Yaller Horse," grunts Tombstone, as he helps himself to Dog Rib's gun and his own, while Mrs. Todd recovers most of the tickets.

I can see and hear all this from my perch on top of the chimbley, where I'm swayin' like a jaybird on a limb.

"Git ready to yank the curtain," says Magpie. "Put all them lanterns inside the manger. Makes it look better. Somebody blow out the lights out in front."

"Somebody calm this here bo-veen, will you?" I asks. "I'm gittin' seasick."

I SEE the lights go out over the audience, and then I hears the curtain go rattlin' back. Every bit of light from all them lanterns is reflected upward, and there I set on that swayin' chimbley top, like an illuminated buffalo coat, decorated with brass sleigh bells, which are jinglin' every time that restless steer weaves back and forth.

I'm gittin' so dizzy I can't look down, and the rest of the world is all black to me.

"It's Ike Harper," says a voice out in the crowd. "The catspaw of Piperock!"

"Don't shoot, Tombstone! You might be mistaken!"

"I'd know him among a million. Don't jiggle m' arm."

"Stand still, you bald faced *oreano!*" yelps Dugout Dulin, and then I hears the splat of that two by four across the rear end of the old steer. *Wham!*

That bullet picked off one of my numerous sleigh bells and sent her jinglin' up among the rafters, and I let loose with both hands. It wasn't quite the longest fall I ever had, and I lit sittin' down, for the simple reason that the chimbley kept me from turnin' over.

But I didn't reach the floor. That old steer's withers was between me and *terry firmy*, as you might say, and I lit a-straddle of 'em. I reckon I lit jist ahead of Dugout's next attempt to pacify the steer from behind, and we was both goin' ahead at the impact.

My nose and chin knocked the front out of that fireplace, and we came right out into that manger. I seen one horn of that steer hook into Dirty Shirt's curtain, and he seemed to kinda open up, like a newspaper in the wind. It must have scared Araby, 'cause in what short time I had, I seen that old camel's shoulders and hump comin' out through the wall, and the camel's mouth was wide open in a perfect "O", like somebody tryin, to blow smoke rings.

"Hook'm, cow!" screams somebody out in that dark audience, and that steer starts sunfishin' right across that platform, headin' for the audience, head down, tail up, and fog horn blowin', while behind us comes Araby, kickin' at everythin' in sight, but follerin' me and the bald faced steer.

It's about eight feet drop to the floor off that platform, and I've got both knees locked right behind that steer's horns, when the fall started. I gets a flash of

Paradise and Yaller Horse and Piperock, goin' backwards over their seats in the dark, and then we landed.

It shore was one awful jolt, but you can't discount the Harper fambly, when it comes to bulldoggin' a steer. I took that animile to the floor in one blaze of glory, as you might say. There's only a few shots fired. There was two fired close to the ceilin', and I think it's Judge Steele up there with his shotgun, judgin' from the sound of it. He was right in the path of Araby the last I seen of him.

I'm pretty much shook to pieces, but I still retain my fightin' instinct, and I got that steer by the horns, holdin' his head close to the floor. We knocked over all the chairs in reach, both of us growin' weaker and weaker as the battle progressed.

Finally the steer said—

"Well, damn you, hold my arms, but git your hair out of my mouth!"

There's a light comin' from somewhere, and I lifts my head to look down at the face of Dog Rib Davidson. One end of his mustache points up and the other points down, one eye swellin' shut and there's hair between his teeth.

The light stops beside us, and I look up at Dirty Shirt Jones, packin' a lantern. Behind him trails that colored curtain, and that's about all the raiment he's got. He looks us over by the light of the lantern.

"Who're you?" asks Dog Rib.

Dirty opens his mouth several times before he says:

"I'm one of the Wise Men who follered a star—but I lost the damn' thing."

"Huntin' for it with a lantern?" I asks.

"I 'member you," says he, his left eye doin' a few loops. "You're the feller who had ticket number eighteen, but I don't 'member your name, feller."

"I'm Sandy Claus."

"Oh, yea-a-a-a-ah!" snorts a voice, and I set up to see Tombstone and his wife. He's got both arms braced against her to keep her upright. She's got the seat of a chair balanced on her head, and her mouth is all puckered up in a silly smile.

"Look out for that steer!" yelps somebody, and here comes the danged animal, wild eyed, with a chair hangin' to one horn. I reckon he got hung up on somethin' around behind the platform, and jist got loose.

But that steer ain't mad; he's scared stiff. He throws up his head like a deer, bawls like a slide trombone, and comes right straight for me, kickin' busted chairs every direction. Tombstone Todd let loose of his wife and jumped out of the way, and the steer hurdled her. I fell sidewise, as the steer surged past, and grabbed holt of its long tail.

Never do that. I went up in the air, sheddin' busted chairs, got a flash of that shiny autymobile in the lantern light, and then my head hit somethin' so hard that all the big and little stars clustered around me. It shore was worth seein', but it got monotonous after awhile.

Suddenly I hears voices, and all them stars went zippin' away.

"Put her feet in, dang you! No, I want her all in. I tell you I'm goin' to take away what I own. Now, you show me how to start her, Dirty Shirt."

I raised up and looked around. I'm in the back seat of that danged machine, along with Mrs. Tombstone Todd, and in the front seat is Tombstone, with a six-gun in his right hand. I can't see Dirty Shirt Jones, but I can see the light of his lantern. Mrs. Todd is sprawled out, snoring lustily.

"Y—you—tut—turn that dud-dingus on that dashboard," sayd Dirty weak-like.

Zee-e-e-e-e! Somethin' kinda hummed a little.

Mrs. Todd jerked upright, surged ahead and grabbed the back of the front seat.

"My Gawd, I've had a nightmare!" says she.

Well, that sudden surge shoved that machine ahead, and it headed right down them two planks. It hit the floor and headed right for the openin' at the head of the stairs, with Tombstone Todd kickin' at every pedal with his feet and

yankin' at every lever with both hands.

"Whoa, you locoed son of a tin-can!" he yelped.

Wham! Bam! Rer-r-r-r-r-r -ro-o-o-o-o-o-w!

I felt that machine jerk ahead like a buckin' horse, and that dark room was filled with lightnin' flashes, a cloud of smoke and the noise of a machine gun. I tried to jump out at the head of the stairs, but I hit against the side of the opening, and got knocked back on top of Mrs. Todd, who is yellin' for Tombstone to let her out.

We shot off the top of them stairs in the dark and I don't reckon we ever touched again until we shot out through that doorway, over the board sidewalk, bounced a couple times in that icy street, made a slight right hand turn jist in time to take every post out from under Buck Masterson's porch. The street is full of screamin' people, horses runnin' away, porch posts goin' up and comin' down.

That's when I lost Tombstone and his wife. The machine whirled around, kinda actin' bowlegged, righted itself, and about that time it must have hit somebody, 'cause I'm enveloped in a suit of clothes that's got somebody inside 'em, and all them little stars came back to play with little Ikie Harper.

I'm conscious of a dull crash, and then perfect peace. I open my eyes, but all is darkness. I can hear somebody movin' around, but I'm not much interested. Then a lamp is lit and I look around. I'm settin' in what's left of that prize machine, and behind me is a wrecked doorway. I look around, and there's Testament Tilton, standin' beside his pulpit, without hardly enough clothes on to flag a handcar. One eye is swelled shut and his nose looks like a pickled beet.

"We'll open services with a prayer," says he solemn-like. "After that I shall endeavor to explain the different scenes of our entertainment. This is Christmas Eve—the evening when peace on earth, good will to men predominates; the evenin' when all men are meek and mild, and a little child shall lead them."

I DUNNO how I got out of there. That busted doorway wasn't quite big enough, 'cause both of my legs had different ideas of direction. I'm still wearin' part of that buffalo coat, and a long string of sleigh bells trail along behind me.

I didn't go uptown. There wasn't anythin' up there to interest me; so I cut across to my own shack. I found Dirty Shirt, Scenery Sims and Magpie there, and they're a fine lookin' lot of undertaker bait.

I just comes jinglin' in and rubs my hands over the fire. Magpie look sad-like at me, but don't say anythin'.

"The steer broke its neck," says Dirty Shirt. "Jumped through a winder and landed on its head."

"Araby died in convulsions," says Scenery.

"And the autymobile went to church," says I.

"Anyway, we're all alive," remarks Magpie.

"Nobody but a damn' optimist would say a thing like that," says I. "I hope you're satisfied, Magpie."

"Oh, shore. It accomplished what we set out to do. We'll have a new church and a bell in the steeple."

I helped myself to their jug, bent myself in the shape of a chair and sat down by the fire.

"Dirty Shirt," says I, "jist why did you and Scenery start this movement for a new church? It's a cinch neither of you got religion.

"Self-p'tection," says Dirty. "That church looked like a saloon. Me and Scenery got drunk and got in there by mistake."

"Ter'ble," says Scenery. "Ter'ble mishtake. Won't happen 'gain, y'betcha. Goin' to have a steeple and a bell; so she'll look and shound like that she is. Well, here's Merry Christmas to all and peace on earth."

I didn't have no gun, and my fists don't seem to be mates; so I took another drink and went huntin' for the horse liniment, as usual.

PART FOUR

Clements Ripley's

Great Novel of Revolution and Romance in Latin America

DUST *and* SUN

PATTERSON STANDISH arrived in the republic of Quetzalpan to work for his uncle's firm, the Pan American Asphalt Company, with all the ill luck in the world to greet him. The country was on the eve of revolution, mainly to save itself from exploitation by the P. A. Company. The P. A. manager at Jaurez, a frog faced man named Wales, informed Standish that a Patterson Standish had already arrived and gone to work in Ciudad Luiz, and that he had no reason to doubt that the first man was the real Patterson Standish. Wales refused to believe Patterson's story of having his passport stolen but his money left intact. So Patterson Standish, after an argument which ended in violence, was thrown into jail.

In the prison he joined forces with a soldier of fortune, Jerry Maxton, who had been responsible for the death of José Ramirez, revolutionist. The two of them escaped, fled upriver to La Boca,

attempted to ride from there to Ciudad Luiz, but were caught near Aguilar and charged with the murder of an old rancher who had been found dead. They escaped again—and arrived in the town of Encarnacíon.

The town was alive with revolutionists. The cafés were noisy with drunken soldiers, and houses were ominously bolted and shuttered. The two American fugitives stole up a dark side street and, by a remarkable coincidence, encountered Maxton's sweetheart, Faith Reed. She took them to the home of her foster-father, Don Diego, who welcomed them as guests.

For a week Patterson Standish languished with fever; for another week he convalesced under Faith's ministrations—and then he fell in love with her. The situation of being in love with his comrade's sweetheart, of remaining a guest of Don Diego when his presence jeopardized the gracious host, and of being in constant danger of an attack by the revolutionists was almost more than he could bear. Yet he welcomed the day when the house was surrounded by soldiers and Don Diego marched to the door and said to the young officer who demanded entrance:

"It is war, Don Juan. You can not enter. Guests are sacred. *Con Dios.*"

That statement boded action.

CHAPTER XXII

THE DEFENSE

WHILE Ramón, the faithful coachman, watched from the roof they held a brief war council in the living room.

Don Diego sat in the big carved chair at the head of the table. On the wall behind him hung a sword, a long, gray blade, with a hilt curiously engraved, which, he once told Standish, had gone with an Espinoza to the Crusades. Below that there was a glass case with the orders and decorations of ten generations of Espinozas, orders all the way from the Golden Fleece to the Great Star of Quetzalpan.

Standish sat at his left and Faith at his right. Maxton lounged on the big chest next the window, a cigaret hanging from the corner of his mouth, a troubled crease between his eyes.

"I wish I had known what was going on," he murmured. "I would never have let this happen to you on my account, Don Diego."

"That I knew." The older man smiled. "Therefore I took care that you should not hear of it until it was done."

"And now I have brought you into trouble." Maxton got to his feet with sudden decision. "Well, it's not too late to do what I can to get you out again."

Faith leaned forward, suddenly tense. Standish wet his lips.

"You don't mean to give yourself up?" he protested.

Maxton gave a short laugh.

"Hardly!" He spoke in English. "When I come, I'll come shootin'."

Faith was on her feet on the instant. She had her hands on his shoulders, trying to drag him down on to the chest again.

"Oh, no, Jerry. No, No! You'll be killed. *Jerry*—"

"Why goodness gracious, Red, there's fellas have got out of worse places before now. This is my meat."

Standish got to his feet, slowly, hating his body for the way it felt, hating his knees for their trembling. He saw Maxton stare, saw Don Diego's head go back and his shoulders stiffen.

He said—

"All right, I'm with you on that, Jerry." He thanked heaven that his voice was all right.

There was a tense moment. Then Maxton drawled:

"Aw, be your age, Ace. Nothin' in the warrant about you. Think it'll do me any good to get you killed?"

Standish glanced at Faith and turned away from the horror in her gray eyes. He said—

"Well, with two of us—"

"*Sit down!*"

For the moment he had forgotten that although Don Diego spoke little English

he understood a good deal. He stared at him.

"Sit down!"

The command was not cracked out quite so sharply as before, but it had the snap and ring of a man who is accustomed to giving orders and having them obeyed. The grave, kindly gentleman they had known was gone. In this moment Don Diego was all soldier.

Almost involuntarily Standish obeyed. He saw Maxton hesitate an instant and then drop back to the chest again. Faith sat down beside him and Standish saw that she was holding to his hand, her fingers white with the intensity of her grip.

"Young men are fools," was Don Diego's pronouncement, delivered with authority. "Here are two who would go out against twenty men, be killed, and ruin everything. Whereas after dark a man might have at least a good chance of slipping through."

"But—" Standish was beginning, when the older man checked him with an upraised hand.

"You are troubled about me, my position. I know that. But do you think a six hour delay will make it any worse?"

Maxton's brows were knit. "No, perhaps not," he agreed slowly. "And without doubt my chances would be better after dark. But I have brought this on you, Don Diego, and it seems to me it would be—"

"It seems to you that it would help me to have you shot down outside my door, Don Jerry—almost in the sight of your betrothed? That is the thought of a young man, and a very foolish young man, for it would not help me at all. But, if you were to slip through their lines tonight, get clear—then, after you were gone—"

"That is exactly what troubles me, sir," Maxton protested. "After I am gone—"

Don Diego smiled blandly.

"After you are gone, Don Jerry, I shall doubtless be forced to permit the indignity of a search, for which Juan Ferrara will be extremely apologetic. Some hours after you are gone, of course."

For the moment Standish did not quite take it in. But Don Diego was going on:

"Naturally, when they do not find you here, that ends it. Juan Ferrara is the son of an old friend, and he will understand the natural unwillingness of a gentleman to have his house searched. I hardly think it will go any further—if they don't find you. And so, you see, my position with the Revolutionary Committee depends on your not being killed but getting clear. And I think I may trust a soldier of your experience to do that."

A wave of almost hysterical relief swept over Standish. Maxton said slowly—

"Well I'll be damned!"

Don Diego permitted himself a small chuckle.

Faith came over slowly and kissed him.

"I knew you could arrange everything," she said with happy confidence.

But Maxton was still troubled.

"Can we hold out until dark?" he wanted to know.

"Of course we can," Faith said scornfully, and turned for confirmation to Don Diego. "Can't we, dearest?"

The old gentleman smiled, and it seemed to Standish that there was a certain joy of battle in it.

"This house was built in the days of Indian fighting, Don Jerry. The doors are heavy and the gate is strong, and th ere is an excellent field of fire from the upper windows."

He glanced around the group, and his tone took on a crisp briskness.

"For our dispositions! You will take the north side, Don Jerry. You will have to prevent their taking cover in the servants' quarters. And you the south, Don Patterson—"with an inclination of the head toward Standish. "I will be on the east, and Ramón, who is faithful but a bad shot, shall watch the west, since there are no doors on that side. No questions? Good. Then we shall do what we may."

KNEELING in front of one of the shuttered windows on the second floor, the muzzle of his rifle—Don Diego had several sporting guns in the house—resting on the sill, Standish peered through the jalousies and scanned the open expanse of waving grass and the little fringe of trees that bordered the stream some three hundred yards away.

Faith sat beside him on the floor, her feet curled under her, and her back to the wall. She had wandered in a moment before and had wanted to look through the jalousies, too, until he had ordered her sharply to keep her head below the sill.

She had obeyed with a curious docility that thrilled him.

"Yes, Pat," as if it were the most natural thing in the world to take orders from him, almost as if she liked it.

She sat quite close to him, so that the fragrance of her, clean like the smell of wheat, came to his nostrils. Once, when she leaned forward her hair brushed his hand where it lay on the gunstock, and when that happened he looked down at his hand in a sort of wonderment at the way it made him feel.

Most of the time he kept his face pressed forward, sternly, testing every inch of the ground in front with his eyes. It gave him a queer, primitive feeling to have her there watching him, to be fighting for her while she looked on.

He understood his position now, since the things she had said in the storeroom just before the revolutionaries had come. He had been mistaken last night on the roof, of course. He was thinking:

"Jerry'll get away all right, and she'll marry him and belong to him forever. But she'll never forget this time I fought for her. That will always be something between us."

Presently she asked:

"Will they try to come this way? Over the gate, I mean?"

Her tone was low, but it was steady and there was no fear in it. He shifted his position a little and took a firmer grip of his rifle.

"They may *try*," he said grimly, and then, with a sudden, shamefaced honesty, "but they probably won't. The real danger is from Jerry's side and Don Diego's, where the outbuildings are. They're the real fighting men of this outfit."

"How absurd, Pat!"

He glued his eye to the slit and tried not to show how it made him feel when she looked at him like that.

And meanwhile nothing happened. The grass rippled, gray green in the light breeze. Pearl-like clouds hung motionless on the blue of the horizon. Down by the stream the tree tops showed silver where the wind ruffled them. A solitary hen scratched disdainfully outside the gate, as though human strife was a small matter compared to the great business of worms.

He began to feel a little flat, to wish the enemy would make some move. He wanted to do something swift and dreadful to justify his sense of protecting her. It almost seemed as if the revolutionaries had given up and gone away after all. That was absurd, of course, but he was surprised to find that the idea was a little disappointing.

MINUTES passed. Down by the stream he thought he saw something move, cautiously. He watched it, tense, brows knit, lips drawn a little back. He said, "*S-s-t!*" and gestured warningly, although Faith was making no sound and none that she could have made could possibly have been heard so far.

Slowly he raised his rifle, cocked it, brought the sights into line. He could hear Faith's quickened breathing and knew that her eyes were wide on him.

But there was no further movement, and presently he brought the rifle down again with a sense of mingled relief and anticlimax.

"Nothing there," he said, frowning.

She relaxed against the wall and smiled up at him.

"I'm glad," she said. "Aren't you?"

He looked at her queerly for an instant. Then the corners of his mouth began to twitch, and then they were laughing together like a couple of children.

"How did you know I felt that way about it?" he demanded.

"I don't know. You looked so—so sort of fierce and valiant. And all at once it came over me that you couldn't be as bloodthirsty as all that."

He grinned.

"I'm a prize desperado," he admitted with mock ruefulness, and they laughed again.

He sobered instantly, remembering Maxton. Maxton would have made hardly more of shooting down a revolutionary soldier than of killing a fly. And after all, that was what he was here for. And this was the girl Maxton was going to marry.

He said:

"But don't forget that we're going to get Jerry out of here. If they come—"

There was a quick, answering soberness in her eyes.

"Of course. We've *got* to get Jerry away. If they come you'll stop them."

He nodded, businesslike, and turned back to his watch with a queer sense of incompleteness, as if he had grasped at a bubble and it had burst at his touch.

The grass rippled and the white, piled cloud hung as still as a picture. It seemed utterly absurd to think of any menace lurking in that innocent fringe of trees along the stream. And then, just as he was opening his mouth to say so, they heard a muffled *wop-wop!* from the other side of the house, and then a quick spurt and crackle, as if the two shots had touched off a pack of firecrackers.

A bullet struck against the wall. Another smashed through the jalousie above his head. He jerked back, startled, and then peered through the slit at the bottom.

For a moment there was nothing, only the waving grass and the silver of blown leaves. Then, as he watched, three little figures popped out of the thicket and flashed across the open towards the house.

HE SNAPPED his rifle up, sighted hastily and pressed the trigger. A roar filled the room and jarred their eardrums. The little figures flopped down like targets in a shooting gallery, and disappeared in the tall grass.

The crackling quickened. On the other three sides of the house the guns were going steadily now. He knit his brows and searched the ground in front for something to shoot at, found nothing, and fired at a venture at the place where he had seen the three disappear. The third shot flushed them like a covey of quail, but before he could fire another they had scattered and gone to ground again. At the same instant an answering hail of bullets rattled against the wall and splintered the jalousies, while a fourth little figure darted out of cover and ran, doubled over, to join the other three.

He fired twice. The man dived into the long grass and the shooting stopped abruptly. In the lull he jerked an empty shell out savagely. This thing of little figures popping up and popping down again before he could line his sights on them, of sudden bursts of fire and sudden silences, and above all the total emptiness of the ground in front—fifteen minutes ago he had thought that was reassuring—was beginning to get on his nerves.

Faith had broken open a box of shells and had them loose in her lap. He snatched a handful and crammed them into the magazine, his eyes on the distant cover.

There was no movement, but at one point along the edge of the stream it seemed to him that he could make out a faint blue haze. That might be the point from which the firing had come. In a sudden, hard rage he put five bullets into it, one after another. There was neither movement nor answering fire, although from the other side of the house there came the steady spit and crackle that showed that Maxton or Don Diego or both were still engaged.

Presently this slackened and died down

as well, and a heavy stillness settled over everything.

So quiet was it that Standish had a queer feeling that none of it was real. But the spent shells on the floor glittered gold in the afternoon sun, and the acrid scent of powder smoke stung his nostrils. When he glanced up, the jalousies were smashed and splintered and flakes of plaster had fallen from the wall across the room.

Faith whispered—

"It isn't all over, is it?"

In the heavy silence it seemed natural to whisper.

He was still watching the grass where the four men had disappeared. He shook his head impatiently.

"Uh-huh. They haven't quit yet—won't, I guess, till they get in."

She was silent a moment.

"You didn't—"

"Don't think so—no."

"Oh!" Then, after a little silence. "It's foolish of me, of course, but I can't get used to the idea."

He said:

"We've got to get Jerry out." Then he added a half shamefaced extenuation of his own poor shooting. "It's harder to hit 'em when they're running than you'd think."

She nodded.

"I know. Well, you'll do what you have to, Pat, I know that." She got to her feet. "I suppose I'd better see what the others are doing—whether they want anything."

Without taking his eyes from the slit, he said:

"Will you? And for God's sake, Faith, keep out of the line of the windows."

She was gone only a minute. Then he heard her coming back and her swift, light step had become a stumbling run.

Something in the sound of it brought his heart into his mouth. He jerked his head around quickly and saw her in the doorway, saw her sway just a trifle and put out her hand to steady herself. But it was her eyes, like the numb, hurt eyes of a child, that brought him to his feet.

"Faith! What is it Faith? You're not hurt?"

She shook her head, dumbly, and somehow, even before she spoke, he knew.

"Oh, Pat! Don Diego is dead."

His first thought was: "She came to me! She didn't go to Jerry, she came to me!" His next was a sick revulsion against himself for thinking of that now.

CHAPTER XXIII

A ROMANTIC MERCENARY

OVER an hour had passed, and there had been no resumption of the attack. The last one seemed to have been only an attempt to feel them out; and as Maxton said:

"Why should they do any more? They know all they've got to do is to wait. No sense wastin' men when they've got all the time in the world."

He had said that when they found that the enemy had cut off the water supply which a ram brought up from the stream.

Now he sat in the north room, the one that commanded the servants' quarters, with his chair tilted against the wall, nursing one lean knee between his hands. Standish sat opposite on the bed. There was no one else in the room, for Ramón was watching from the roof, and Faith was downstairs where the body of Don Diego lay in the darkened living room with candles at the head and feet.

"This changes things a whole lot."

Maxton was speaking, and there was no need for Standish to ask to what he referred. He said:

"It cuts us down to three rifles, of course." He spoke with a dull wonder that, even with Don Diego's body downstairs and Faith sitting beside it, numb with the pain of it, he could turn his mind to the practical details of their position.

"I wish that was all." Maxton spoke soberly, and went on in answer to the unspoken question, "Don Diego was a man of a lot of influence in these parts. That and his bein' a friend of this Juan Ferrara would most likely have kept him out

of any very serious mess over this thing. But Ferrara's no friend of yours. So far as he's concerned, you're nothin' but a common Lopezista now, resistin' a warrant of the Revolutionary Committee. And the market on Lopezistas is low."

Standish frowned impatiently.

"Oh, don't worry about me," he said. "So long as you get out of here I'll get along some way."

Maxton raised his brows.

"Don't fret yourself," he told him. "I'm not worryin' about you."

"Well then—" Standish was beginning, when he caught the other man's meaning. "Look here," he said breathlessly, "they can't do anything to her. She hasn't done anything."

Maxton said evenly:

"There ain't any limit to what that crowd can do if they put their minds to it. I'm not afraid of this Ferrara arrestin' her, naturally. He's a gentleman. But suppose he just shoves you into jail for a while, which is about the least that can happen now. What's goin' to happen to a pretty girl, alone and under suspicion, too? You've seen something of what these folks are like when they get wound up."

Standish caught his breath as the thing sank into him. He heard himself ask, in a voice curiously unlike his own—

"What do you mean?"

He heard Maxton's inexorable:

"You know damn' well what I mean. There's only one kind of girl travels alone in this country."

"Then what—" he stopped short. "Then we'll have to try to get through tonight, all three of us. We'll have to take her."

"We will not." The words came quick and decisive. "One man might have a chance to get through. Two men and a girl would have exactly the same chance that I have of bein' elected Pope—and I was raised up a hardshell Baptist."

He leaned forward suddenly, and the legs of his chair hit the floor with a thump.

"Ace, there's only one thing we can do now. Trade with 'em."

"Trade?" Standish's mind, terribly busy with the picture of Faith alone in Quetzalpan, was slow to take his meaning.

Maxton made it plainer impatiently.

"Trade, I said. They want me. We want to get Red out of here. Well, we'll trade."

Standish jerked himself upright on the bed.

"You mean— No, sir, not on your life!"

"Now wait," Maxton told him calmly. "I know how you feel, heroic and all that. It's a right good way to feel, but in this case it don't get us anywheres. What we're lookin' at is facts. We can't hold 'em off forever, and even if I was to get through tonight you and Ramón can't handle all four sides of the house long enough for me to get far. Now, I'll go out and trade with 'em on condition they don't make trouble for anybody else. This Ferrara is a gentleman by Don Diego's say-so, and if he says that he'll stick to it. What we want is to get Red out of here."

"Not that way."

"All right, you find a better way. I'm not achin' to get my neck broke. But in the meantime you listen to me. Suppose I try to sneak out tonight, suppose I even get away, and that's not so easy done as I made out to Don Diego either. You're in for it anyhow, and that leaves Red all alone in this mess. On the other hand, I can go out and trade with 'em under a white flag and that puts her in the clear and leaves you to get her out of Quetzalpan—although God knows how you're goin' to do it. Now is there sense to that? I ask you."

STANDISH stared at the floor, thinking hard. There was a sane, reasoning part of his brain that accepted every bit of the other man's logic, but there was another part, with no reason at all, that rejected it utterly.

He said:

"Look here, Jerry, that's all very fine and all that, but it won't do. I'm not

going to have you giving yourself up, and that's that. There must be some other way."

For a moment Maxton said nothing, and Standish could see his fingers tapping the edge of his chair. Then he turned on him.

"You fool, what do you think you've got to do with it? Think I'm doin' it for *you?* Listen, you're a good fella and all that, but do you think for one minute that my life ain't more valuable to me than yours? If you do, just forget it. I'm doin' this on account of Red, and I'm goin' to do it, and you're goin' to help me, and that's all there is to it."

"Look here." Standish leaned forward earnestly. "You've asked me things about Faith—what she'd think about things, and all that. Let me tell you, if you don't know. She'd never in this world let you do a thing like that on her account."

"She ain't goin' to have a thing to say about it, or you either." His tone was smooth and controlled again, but his fingers were tapping the edge of his chair. "Now you listen; I'm a middlin' hard *hombre* with a record of killin's and robberies, but just once in my life, I'm goin' to do something that I can be proud of, something like Don Diego'd have done. And you're goin' to help me by takin' a white flag out and talkin' to 'em for me."

Standish got to his feet. His brain was humming with a queer exaltation. He had even some vague idea of going out in Maxton's place, of passing himself off for Maxton. But that was too fantastic, of course. Too many people in Encarnación would know the man who killed José Ramirez by sight.

He said:

"Not much, I won't. We'll stay here and fight, or we'll get through them tonight some way. I don't care. But this other thing is out, and Faith will back me to the limit on that. Let me call her if you don't believe it."

"Wait. Hold on!" Maxton was now up too in a panic. "Don't you dare to say a word to her about it. Come back here!" Then, in a more normal tone, "Talk sense, fella. I s'pose it would tickle her to the limit to have the two of us dead and her left alone in this mess, wouldn't it. Now I know how she'd feel about this if she knew it," he went on swiftly before Standish could protest. "That's why she ain't goin' to know a thing till it's too late. She's down there now, in the livin' room. You rig up a white flag of some kind and slip downstairs and outside—"

He looked at Standish, and there was no banter or hardness in his eyes now, only a steady light and a question.

"I'm doin' this because I want to," he said. "Just once in my life I'm goin' to be romantic—and it's sensible, too."

Standish hesitated. Then he shook his head.

"It won't do, Jerry," he was beginning when they heard a shot, and then two more.

Maxton picked up his rifle and stepped to the window.

"See you about it later," he called over his shoulder. "Better get to your window now."

IN FRONT of the splintered jalousies in the room where Don Diego had died, Standish searched the ground in front with his eyes and combed his brain for a solution to their problem. Maxton must not be allowed to give himself up. That was out of the question. There had to be some other way; that was all there was about it.

He had just made up his mind that their best chance lay in trying to get through tonight, all three of them, when there was a call from the roof.

The words were muffled, but the voice was Ramón's, and the tone was urgent. He made a hasty survey of the ground in front of his window and found it empty of any sign of life. The distant cover, the outbuildings, the open ground between, lay vacant in the drowsy afternoon sunlight.

The call came again. He shouted and had an answer as unintelligible as before. Evidently Faith had heard it, too,

for he heard her running up the stairs.

He crammed a handful of shells into his pocket, picked up his rifle, took another hasty glance through the window, and ran out into the hall. She met him, breathless, at the top of the stairs, her eyes wide with alarm.

"What is it? What's happened?"

"I don't know. Just going up to see."

At that moment there was another shout from Ramón:

"Excellency! Excellency! There is something—"

He raced along the hall and up the short flight to the roof. The trap was open, and as he put his head through, he saw Ramón at the north side, watching something across the low parapet.

"Keep down," he cautioned Faith, who had come up beside him. "What is it, Ramón? Keep your head down, man."

The *cochero*, who had forgotten caution in his excitement, dropped on all fours abruptly and turned a startled face.

"Pardon, Excellency! Out there one is waving a white flag."

"A white flag?" He climbed through the trap and ran, doubled over, across the roof. Glancing back, he saw that Faith was following. "Keep down," he cautioned her again. "This may be some kind of a trick."

He reached the place where Ramón crouched, and raised his head cautiously.

What he saw puzzled him. There were five men, who had just come out of the cover beyond the low, flat roofed servants' quarters. Even at that distance he could recognize the flare of Juan Ferrara's riding breeches. The other four were revolutionary soldiers, and one had a piece of white cloth tied to the barrel of his rifle.

"What does that mean?" Faith wanted to know.

"They want to talk to us, I guess. Well, I don't know what there is to talk about, but I can't see that it'll do any harm."

He hesitated a moment, then realizing that Maxton was certain to see them anyway, he turned to Ramón.

"Go down and ask Don Jerry to come up," he told him. "He is in the room right under us—the north room. Funny he hasn't said anything," he added, puzzled and a little troubled. "He must have seen it."

"*Sí*, Excellency—" Ramón was beginning, when Faith interrupted.

"Jerry? No, he isn't," she told them. "He came downstairs just a minute before Ramón called. I think he went out into the— Pat! What's the matter? What is it?"

"He went out?"

Standish was staring at her. He felt suddenly gone in the legs.

"Outside?"

"Why, yes. Out into the patio. I heard—"

Ramón's excited cry interrupted.

"See, see, Excellency!"

Standish's head jerked around like the head of an automaton. What he saw made his heart sink. Maxton had just stepped out from behind the servants' quarters. He had his white coat by the sleeves, swinging it, and he was walking out toward the revolutionaries.

"He must have waved it from the window," was his first conscious thought.

Faith gave a little cry.

"Oh what's he— Pat! He's giving up! Oh, he isn't giving up, is he?"

Standish nodded dumbly.

"Oh, he mustn't!" She twisted her hands together. "Make him stop! Make him hear! Jerry!" She waved frantically, standing on tiptoe. "*Jerry!*"

He found his voice suddenly and joined it to hers. "Jerry! Come back here, you fool—Jerry!"

Maxton was perhaps a hundred yards away now. He waved his coat reassuringly to the revolutionaries and turned back to the three on the roof.

"Don't try anything," he warned. "It wouldn't help me and it would get you in dutch."

The words came up to them, absolutely clear, but faint, as if—Standish thought helplessly—he were already dead and communicating from another world.

He tried again, despairingly, cupping his hands about his mouth.

"Jerry! Come back here!"

He could catch the shake of Maxton's head.

"Not a chance. I'll wave if everything's O. K. Get Red out of Quetzalpan." And again, a moment later, "Get Red away. So long. Good luck!"

The words came up to them, thin and drawn out, like a voice on the telephone. It was hopeless, he knew, but he had to shout again.

"Jerry, don't be a fool. Come back! Jerry!"

Maxton waved. They were too far away to see his expression, but Standish could sense it—that whimsical, half humorous, half rueful quirk to the corners of his mouth that he had seen more than once in a tight place. He turned and walked toward Ferrara and his men.

"Oh, isn't there some way? Oh, stop him, Pat! *Pat!*"

He shook his head.

"There's nothing. He's gone now."

They watched him move across the rippling grass, easy, unhurried, his coat thrown over his arm, as a man might go to meet a friend. A little before he reached the soldiers he stopped.

They could see him talking with Ferrara—little toy figures on a toy landscape, all turquoise and copper dun in the late afternoon sun. Then his arm went up to tell them that everything was arranged, that there was nothing more to fear.

"He's done it," Standish said.

The five closed in around Maxton and they moved off together, down a little draw and out of sight.

CHAPTER XXIV

RESPONSIBILITY

THEY buried Don Diego in the morning. Standish decided that the less attention they attracted to the Estancia Espinoza the better; consequently he did not try to get a priest. He did not try to explain it to Faith. She had moved about the house since last night, small and white and quiet, and he could not bear to add an extra detail to her trouble. As a matter of fact she did not seem to notice the omission.

He and Ramón had dug the grave, very early in the morning, near the flowering shrub Don Diego had loved and whose leaves he had crushed that day in the patio for Standish to smell. Faith came out and gathered an armful of the blossoms to cover the plain wooden box that Ramón had made over night, and stood at the head of the grave as the two lowered it.

She was curiously contained through it all. He could see the misery in her eyes, and her mouth wrung his heart, but she said nothing, and when he wanted to fill in the opening she moved back from it without a word or a tear.

It was done at last. They watched in silence while Ramón gathered up the shovels and carried them around to the back of the house, a little old stoop shouldered figure with a wrinkled, tragic face. They turned and went into the patio.

And as they came through the gate the old hound lifted his gray head inquiringly and thumped the flags with his tail, and suddenly Faith threw her arm across her face with a choking gasp.

He caught his breath. He put out his hand. And then somehow—he did not know himself how it happened—she was in his arms, and her head was against his shoulder, and he was stroking her hair, murmuring empty words of comfort; they kissed, then jerked apart.

"Oh, I *do* love Jerry! I do! I don't know why I—"

His brain was a whirl of jangled thoughts. Only two things stood out clearly—the picture of Maxton, moving out across the rippling grass toward the waiting soldiers, and a huge, sick disgust with himself. He said:

"Oh, Faith! Of course you love Jerry. I never thought anything else." He babbled on, anything to make it seem

better. "I didn't mean—it was just that you looked so unhappy. *Please*, I do understand. You were tired and miserable, and the strain—"

She looked at him gratefully.

"Oh, you do see, don't you? Oh, he gave himself up for me. We've got to do something to help him. I've got to!"

Outwardly he was the steadier of the two now. He heard himself saying—

"Of course, just as soon as I can get you safe—"

"No, Pat—no! I've got to help him *now!*"

Something in the tone brought him up with a jerk. He stared at her.

"Faith! You don't know what you're talking about. The first thing you've got to do is to get safe—out of Quetzalpan."

"But I can't!" Her gray eyes were wide with intensity. "Don't you see that I've got to do something for Jerry?"

"Listen, Faith. You just don't know. Suppose something happened and you were left alone. I promise you that the minute you're safe I'll come back, and I'll get him for you some way."

He had already promised himself that. It seemed the only possible way of wiping out what had happened.

But it was not enough to satisfy her.

"It will be too late then. You know that."

"It won't. Listen, we'll start now—this afternoon. And I'll come back and—Faith, *please!* Jerry wanted to have you safe, more than he wanted to get away himself. You can't throw him down now—"

He stopped with a sudden gone feeling as he remembered that embrace and kiss. He tried to tell himself that it had just been a comforting kiss—friendly—but the memory of it was too vivid. He knew that was not so.

She was saying:

"But it will be too late. Oh, Pat, don't you see that nothing matters now except Jerry? It's the one thing I've got to do, that we have."

He looked at her and a queer, unreasoning exhilaration began to lay hold upon him. He said:

"If there was a chance—any possible chance—" Then common sense reasserted itself, and he added, "But there isn't."

She caught at the note of wavering.

"There is. There's got to be. And anyway, I couldn't be somewhere safe—"

She stopped with a little gesture that said, "after what happened". And suddenly he understood that she loved him, and in the same instant he understood that never, so long as Maxton was in danger, would she admit it even to herself.

He met her eyes, and for that second each knew what the other was thinking without the need of words. Hers said, "Will you, for both our sakes?" and his said, "I will."

IT WAS a long day, still and hot. Faith had disappeared into her room, and Ramón had gone to town. He had volunteered to find out what he could about Maxton.

Standish had hesitated to let him go at first, thinking of what had happened to him two days before. But the old man was insistent. He had developed an unexpected eagerness to help. He seemed to feel in some vague way that by getting the information they wanted he was being of service to Don Diego, and Faith.

"It will make him happier, I think," she had said. "And besides it will be easier for him to find out things than it would for you or me."

The day wore on. Once, in the early afternoon, a platoon of revolutionaries rode by a quarter of a mile or so away, and Standish loaded a rifle and put it conveniently to hand. But the little column trotted past in a rolling cloud of red dust and presently disappeared in the direction of Encarnación.

He wondered whether Juan Ferrara might have had anything to do with that; whether he might have arranged that they should not be molested in the future. He doubted that. Ferrara had apparently kept the bargain Maxton had made with

him, not to take any action in the matter of resisting a warrant, but naturally his word would not bind the Revolutionary Committee.

Later he took the four best horses—Faith helped him pick them—and hid them in a thicket by the stream.

His own calmness surprised him a little. In the beginning he had dreaded the long day. He had made certain that he was going to be increasingly nervous about the night. And he was nervous; he could tell that by the dryness of his mouth and the restless way he moved about the house. But it seemed to be a thing purely of his body. His mind was occupied with plans to the subordination of everything else, even Faith. And he found himself looking forward to the night with a cold eagerness different from anything he had ever felt before.

There had been a thrill in escaping from the prison at Jaurez, and in riding into the ambush outside of La Boca, but it was a different thrill entirely. Then he had been heaved into it bodily by force of circumstances, and had fought through with a sort of animal desperation. Now he was going into something that was infinitely more dangerous, but he was going into it of his own accord and with his eyes open.

That made all the difference—that and Faith. The touch of her was still with him—and that made what he was doing the only thing that was worth while. Getting Maxton out was the one thing that mattered now.

RAMÓN came back a little before sundown with a tale to tell.

Everybody in Encarnación knew all about Don Jerry. *Sí, de boca en boca!* All day long there had been a crowd around the *cuartel* waiting to get a sight of him, and once, when he had come to the window for a second—*sí*, Excellency, he himself had seen it—they yelled so that it was enough to frighten one. *Pues, sí*—bad people, those people of Encarnación. Very wicked people. If they could get at the poor Don Jerry for one little instant they would tear him to pieces like a rag. Like wolves! *Sí*, God would punish such people.

The report he brought of Maxton's situation was not encouraging. He was on the second floor of the town jail, Standish gathered. The window of his cell, as an obliging guard had informed the crowd, was the third from the corner, counting east from the Bolivar Calle. And it had bars. *Sí*, Excellency, great iron bars of three *centimetros* thickness. *Madre de Dios*, that poor Don Jerry! And no one might enter the *cuartel* without an order signed by the Revolutionary Committee itself. No one. And there was a sentry, too—*pues, sí*, with a gun, and he walked up and down beneath the window so. All the length of the *cuartel* he walked, day and night, back and forth. Clearly Ramón considered the case hopeless.

On the face of it, it looked little short of that to Standish himself. The barred window might be taken care of, he supposed. Bars could be filed; he had read of escapes made that way. But the sentry was a different matter.

He wondered whether the man could be bribed. Probably; but it would be a delicate thing to try with the feeling what it was. If the man should happen to be incorruptible, everything would be ruined before it was started. He decided against that, except as a last resort.

He could not handle him the way Maxton had handled the guard at the gate of the prison at Jaurez, either, because first he must get a file up to Maxton somehow and then wait until the next night to give him time to cut through the bars. He had very little idea how long that would take, but it could not be done before they discovered an unconscious sentry, he was sure.

Well, it was no use getting the wind up at this stage of the game, before he had even started. He told himself, "I knew this wasn't going to be any picnic when I started," and somehow he got a certain comfort from the thought as he went upstairs to get ready.

Ramón had furnished a pair of white cotton trousers, shapeless and dirty, and a pair of rope soled *alpargatas*. He had thought of going barefoot at first as most of the revolutionaries seemed to do, but a second thought made him give that up. His feet were too soft. A big hat, a rifle, and an old cartridge belt of Don Diego's completed his costume. With his shoulders slouched and a cigaret hanging from one corner of his mouth, it would have taken more than a casual glance, after dark at any rate, to distinguish him from any of the hundreds of soldiers who crowded the streets of Encarnación.

He put a small file—he had found it in the blacksmith shop down by the stables—in one pocket and a little bottle of oil in another. He was vague on the purpose of the oil, but he had read somewhere that escaping prisoners used it for something. He was quite definite on one thing, however; in spite of the sentry, he was somehow going to get them to Maxton tonight.

FAITH met him in the lower hall. He took one look at her and stared.

"My Lord! What's the idea?"

She had on a dirty calico dress that came to her ankles, a shapeless affair with a once brilliant purple stripe around the bottom. She had covered her head with a shawl that hid her hair and threw her face into the shadow. When she moved, he saw that she was wearing *alpargatas* like his own, without stockings.

"Isn't it attractive?" She pirouetted and spread her skirts. "The dress belongs to Manuel's wife and the shawl is one Josepha left. Putting them on took real courage, you better believe." She gave a little shudder.

He brushed that aside.

"Look here," he demanded. "You haven't got any fool idea that you're coming with me? Because you're not."

She looked at him, wide eyed.

"Why of course I am. Surely you don't think you're going to do it all?" She laughed nervously. "What colossal conceit!"

"Now Faith—" patiently, reasonably—"that's absurd, of course."

"Why is it absurd? I can ride as well as any man around here, and I can shoot. I know the town and the way the country people talk—and your Spanish is awful. You've got that belt over the wrong shoulder, by the way."

He shifted it.

"But look here, Faith, this is no place for a girl. It's dangerous."

She threw her hand out in a little nervous, exasperated gesture.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't be so superior! I suppose you think you'll have to take care of me. Well don't—I don't expect to be taken care of. There are two of us, that's all."

"But this isn't a place where two people can do any better than one," he protested. "Even if you weren't a girl—"

"Oh, can't you see that it's just because I am a girl that you need me?"

"What do you mean?" The complete change of front had thrown him off his guard.

"The sentry, silly. I'm going to take care of the sentry."

He stared at her.

"You certainly are not."

"Aren't I, though!" She laughed, but there was a thin, high strung edge to her laughter. She slipped out of reach as he put out his hand. "I'm going to vamp the handsome soldier," she teased as she danced down the hall ahead of him.

Even as he tried to argue with her, Standish was marveling at the way her slim body could transfigure the shapeless clothes she was wearing.

"And don't I know how it's done, though!" She was giggling. "Look here." She struck a pose at the foot of the stairs, one knee a little out-thrust, one shoulder high, and glanced back at him archly. "Oh, I haven't managed a houseful of servants without seeing things."

"Faith, for heaven's sake—"

"As Jerry would say, 'Be your age, Ace.'" She drawled it out so that the imitation was perfect. He had never seen her like this before.

"Let me tell you it took courage to put on those clothes," she was going on, "and to put this shawl over my head. I haven't any idea of going through that for nothing."

Her mood changed suddenly. She came closer to him and looked at him pleadingly.

"Please, Pat, Jerry's my responsibility. I couldn't just sit here and let you do it all. I've got to help. Don't you see?"

He did see—he had to—and in the end she had her way.

CHAPTER XXV

THE WINGS OF AN EAGLE

CONSCIOUSLY, Standish tried to register on his memory every detail of that ten miles to Encarnación, riding in under the stars. Little things had suddenly become of enormous importance. The smell of hot dust; the road, a dim ribbon flung out between low, black hills; the clink of bits and the creak of saddles; white foam flecks thrown up when the horses tossed their heads. They were things he had never noticed before. Now, when he thought, "Perhaps tonight is the last time . . ." they were infinitely precious to him.

And yet, in spite of solemn warnings to himself that this might be his last ride, he knew that he did not believe it. There was an electric vitality in him tonight that scoffed at the thought. And he could sense the same thing in Faith, riding beside him, a feeling of life, vibrant and quenchless.

She rode easily, one slim leg thrown over the horn of her saddle. The nervous, hectic gaiety that she had shown earlier in the evening was gone now. She was quiet, and her voice was cool and steady, but under its steadiness he could feel a quick tenseness that was like his own.

Once he pushed his horse over and put his hand over hers, where it lay on her knee, felt the swift pressure of her slender fingers before she withdrew it gently.

"Frightened, Faith?"

"Of course not. Well, not frightened exactly, but—yes I am. I'm scared to death."

"So am I," he confessed, and they laughed together with the thrill of a couple of children doing something secret and forbidden.

It was between ten and eleven o'clock when they saw the lights of Encarnación and dismounted, turning the reins over to Ramón, who led the horses off into a thicket near the road.

Faith and Standish took their way into town on foot, past the huddle of dark, tumbledown shanties that clung to the outskirts, and into a narrow thoroughfare infrequently lit by gas flares. Standish, who had half expected the approaches to be patrolled, breathed freely again. Their adventure, it seemed, was well under way.

This was the quarter, Faith told him, where lived the shopkeepers and well-to-do business men of the town. The houses were well built and substantial, three and sometimes four stories, most of them with little gardens enclosed by walls. But in spite of their air of comfort and prosperity it seemed to him that tonight the atmosphere of the quarter was permeated with nervous dread. The street was almost deserted. Along the whole length of it they passed only two men, and these hurried by with something apprehensive and furtive in their manner. The houses themselves were dark except for an occasional gleam from some small barred opening, and most of the windows were heavily shuttered. Evidently the men of property of Encarnación were not trusting the revolutionary spirit very far.

He understood it better when they passed a house with the shutters torn open and the door hanging crazily by one hinge, and felt the crunch of glass underfoot. There were other things too—rags and odds and ends of broken furniture scattered along the pavement—that

proved that Don Diego's had not been the only house looted.

A quarter of a mile farther on, the street turned abruptly into the plaza, a blaze of light and a bedlam of noise that made a startling contrast to the quiet darkness from which they had come.

In addition to the gas flares there were bonfires, where old boxes, straw, smashed and looted furniture, and all the odds and ends that the drunken mob could scrape together burned to the accompaniment of explosions where some joker had tossed a handful of cartridges into the blaze. Occasionally some one came out of one of the wineshops and threw on a bucket of crude oil and the flames licked up through a pillar of greasy smoke and cast a grotesque, flickering light over the square.

EVERYTHING was wide open and running full blast. The sidewalks swarmed with drunken soldiers. Phonographs blared from the open doorways. There were screams, yelling laughter, shots, the crash of splintering glass.

Standish felt Faith's hand on his arm. He hesitated with the dark street behind and the noise and blaze ahead.

"Can't we get round this some way?" he whispered.

She shook her head unhappily.

"No. Oh, Pat—"

"All right then. Keep up your nerve and hang on to me."

He pushed forward into the crowd, with Faith clinging to his arm.

"This isn't the way the country people walk," she breathed in his ear. "I ought to be behind you, of course. I know it's silly of me," she added, "but if I let go I'm afraid I'll faint."

There was a hint of a breathless giggle in her voice. He shot her a quick look and gave her arm a reassuring squeeze.

"Keep hold of yourself. We'll be through here in a minute."

Most of the crowd was drunk. They were good natured enough in the main, but occasionally there was some turbulence. Once, just in front of them, a man shot out of the open door of a *cantina* and lunged across the sidewalk into the gutter, to the accompaniment of maudlin laughter from inside. He picked himself up, stood weaving uncertainly a moment, and then charged back in. There were howls, thumps, oaths, and the smashing of glass and he catapulted out again on all fours.

At another time half a dozen soldiers bore down on them, arms linked, filling the whole sidewalk, and for a moment Standish's muscles tensed, for they were passing a fire at the time and there was no room to step off into the street. But the soldiers broke their rank just in time and let them through with a barrage of noisy jokes which he did not understand.

Bareheaded girls, usually in twos, paraded up and down through the crowd, staring at the soldiers with bold, hard eyes, their olive faces enameled into queer, purplish masks, their mouths scarlet. Once, as one of them switched past Faith, he saw her glance at the long, ungainly skirt and the shawl, and he caught a word or two which meant nothing to him, but which evidently did to her, for she tightened her clutch on his arm and hurried a little.

"Steady!" he cautioned in an undertone, and she answered:

"It's all right. Silly of me."

They had passed through the thickest of the crowd by now and presently as they came to another street he felt her relax and heard her breath of relief.

"Down here," she told him. "Oh, I'm glad to get through that. I'm not as brave as I thought I was."

"You're doing splendidly," was his response to that. "Keep it up." He was exultant now, for it seemed that their disguises were good enough to pass any casual inspection, even in the light.

The street they had entered was nearly as dark and deserted as the first. Apparently, anybody who wanted to be out at all wanted to be at the plaza where things were happening. He took this for a good augury. The thing that had worried

him more than anything else was the possibility that there might still be a crowd around the prison.

"This is the Calle Bolivar we're on," Faith was telling him under her breath. She seemed to have recovered her steadiness now that they were out of the mob. "That's—yes, that's the prison right ahead. Oh, Pat!"

HE UNDERSTOOD the quick dismay in her voice as he looked at it. There was something overwhelming and implacable about the square stone building, set grimly apart from the others. It made him think of the clang of steel doors, of lime washed corridors with rows of barred cells. He could smell the fetid, greasy smells and hear the whisperings and creakings of men stirring on their cots through the horrors of another endless, locked up night. Somehow no part of the attempt came as near to shaking his nerve as this moment.

He pulled himself out of it by main force. Maxton was in there, and he was here to get him out.

"Sure enough—there's the prison," he said in what was meant to be a casual, common sense tone, and the sound of his own voice heartened him.

"Here's the turn," Faith was whispering. "The third window east from the Calle Bolivar, Ramón said. Oh, my soul! It's so dark we can't count the windows!"

They had turned into a little side street, black as a pocket except for a flare at its farther end. Standish looked up at the side of the building with quick dismay. He had never thought of its being too dark to locate Maxton's cell. It would be maddening to have a thing like this throw everything out.

"We'll have to do the best we can and take a chance. The first window ought to be about here. Then the second—"

He felt Faith go rigid with a little sound that was like a moan. His own heart skipped a beat. At the other end of the building, under the light, there was a man with a rifle, and as they watched, he turned and came toward them, pacing slowly.

"The sentry!" he breathed. He caught her hand in a quick grip of panic. "Listen, Faith, while there's still time—get back—or wait around the corner—"

Her hands clung to him.

"No, Pat—*no!* Oh, be quiet. He's coming!"

BEFORE he could disengage her hands the moment had passed and it was too late. He sank down in a limp heap by the wall, while Faith bent over him as if she were trying to get him on to his feet again.

The man came on. They could see him clearly now, silhouetted against the light, a short, stocky figure, walking carelessly, with his rifle thrown across his arm. His shadow danced before him grotesquely when the breeze flickered the flare.

He came within half a dozen feet before he saw them. Then Faith straightened and he shot out a startled challenge and slapped his rifle down to cover them.

"Friends, señor," she told him in a small, frightened voice. "We are friends. Please of your goodness don't shoot."

"Ha!" said the man, and came nearer cautiously, making a great parade of holding his rifle ready. He caught sight of Standish, half sitting and half lying against the wall.

"*Pues*, what kind of a friend is this then?"

Faith leaned over and shook him.

"Pig! Wretched animal! The *caballero* asks you a question."

There was no answer but a grunt. She straightened again.

"Look at him!" she declaimed scornfully. "He lies there like a dead cow. Perhaps he expects me to carry him home, the great lump."

The sentry bent to look. He struck a match and examined him. He shook him by the shoulder, prodded him with his foot. Standish kept his eyes shut and his head on his chest.

"*Dios!* There is one who sleeps sound."

"May he waken in hell!" was Faith's pious wish. And I refused Pedro Ruiz and Pablo Chacon—yes and plenty of others to marry that! Get up, drunkard that you are. Is this—" her voice rose to a higher pitch—"is this how you keep your promise to show me the great Yankee—the murderer? For this, then, you have me walk ten miles in the dust, so that you can get yourself so drunk that you can't even point out his window, and I must go back and be a laughing stock all over the *población!* Pig!"

The sentry laughed.

"*Ce!* You'll tell him some things when he wakes up, eh? But don't pull all his hair out, little angel. I can show you the window of the murderer at any rate."

Instantly she was all admiring attention.

"You can? The *Yanqui?* That Don Jerry Maxton who murdered the poor Don José Ramirez, rest his soul in peace?" She clasped her hands and stepped nearer. "Oh, if you would, señor. Where then?"

Her voice had become considerably louder, but that might have been the excitement.

"You can show me the window of Don Jerry Maxton?" she repeated, still more loudly, and this time Standish's heart skipped a beat, for she said it in the American fashion instead of "Herrie Max'on" as the native people did.

But the sentry did not notice. He was pointing now, explaining.

"The third from the end. It is almost above where your husband lies."

"The dirty animal!" Faith put in. "Oh, but I can't see," she wailed. "It is so dark that I can't even see the window. If only by the grace of God he would light a match—"

Standish grinned delightedly in the darkness. All they had planned was that Faith should get the sentry away while he somehow got into communication with Maxton, but thanks to her quickness this was going to be better. And she was handling it beautifully.

"Make him light a match, señor," she was pleading. "Call to him! Here am I, who walk ten miles through the dust and and stand outside ten thousand cafés while that imbecile there drinks himself dumb and blind, and I must go home without a sight of the murderer. And Angelita has seen him, and Maria, and even that fat daughter of the Pit, Concha Chacon, whose husband I might have had ten times over in spite of the airs she puts on—she has seen him. Call him to the window, señor, and God will reward you. See, I will call him myself. Don Jerry! Don Jerry! Come to the window, Don Jerry!"

"Quiet, in the name of heaven, quiet, little pigeon! What if the officer of the guard should hear you?"

"I don't care. Perhaps he would have pity on a poor girl who has walked ten miles through the dust—"

Standish's heart leaped, for at that moment, out of the darkness above a voice drawled:

"Say, what's all the shootin' for? Can't you let a fella get some sleep?"

As proudly as though it were all his doing, the sentry announced:

"There he is! That is his voice speaking now." Faith's little cry of excitement was more real than simulated.

"Oh!" she cried. "The murderer? What does he say? Oh, make him light a match so that I can see him."

"He is speaking in *Yanqui,*" the sentry informed her importantly. "But what he says I do not know." Obligingly he conveyed her request that Maxton would light a match and show himself.

Grumbling a little at the loss of his sleep and a great deal at the foolishness of people who would hang around a prison when they ought to be miles away attending to their business—all this in English—the prisoner presently complied. There was a spurt of a match, and the window glowed yellow. He even came to the bars and lighted a cigaret, so that the flare of the match threw his lean face into relief for a moment.

It was long enough for Standish to twist his neck in the dark and locate the window. He had guessed fairly closely,

but he would have to move some six or eight feet to the left to be directly under it.

"And so, by the grace of heaven, you have your wish," the sentry was saying as the cigaret glowed and paled above them. "You have seen the murderer, little one."

Faith sighed wistfully.

"The poor man—and so handsome. If one might have a lover like that now—but this drunken fool—"

The sentry was amused.

"And what good would a lover like that be?" he wanted to know. "Shut up in a cage like a rabbit. What could you do?"

"Do?" Her tone was dreamy, but Standish noted delightedly that it was strong enough to carry to the window. "I'd sell my bracelets—everything—to buy him whatever he needed. And then I'd come under his window and he would let down a string and I'd tie the things on so he could pull them up. And he would throw me down love tokens. He would understand me, that one. *Maria!* What wouldn't one do for a lover like that? And I must be tied to that animal who snores directly under his window and will not even look up. I wish he might drop something on him and hit him—the pig."

FROM the blackness above Maxton's cigaret dropped in a little trail of sparks. He had heard and understood. The sentry laughed.

"There is your love token," he bantered, but Faith had already pounced on it with a little scream of joy.

"*Gracias!*" she called up to the window. "*Gracias, senor asesino! Gracias, Don Jerry!*"

She put it to her lips and sucked it to a glow, so that for an instant it lighted her face.

"*Dio mio,* his cigaret! Wait till I show this to that fat she-devil Concha. She will shake herself into a jelly with jealousy."

The sentry bent over her, chuckling.

"Don't forget who arranged it all for you, little pigeon. After all, there are plenty of lovers. Perhaps some one might take his place."

She giggled and slipped away from him.

"Perhaps. But he would have to be a soldier—and handsome. Where is a girl to find one like that?"

As she spoke, she moved a little farther off, and the sentry followed, until Standish could barely hear the murmur of their voices. At intervals the cigaret glowed for an instant so that he could tell just where they were. He was delighted with the cleverness of that.

He crawled over cautiously until he was directly under the window. It was dark again, but from above he could hear Maxton humming an old song:

> "Will you wait, wait, wait
> By the garden gate?
> Will you *wait* till the cows come home?"

over and over, with especial emphasis on the "wait".

Something tapped the brim of his hat. He put his hand up, and felt a thin cord, weighted with a button. The cord seemed to be a raveling of something. Working fast, he tied on a strong, light string and gave it a little pull.

It began to slip up through his fingers. When it had come nearly to the end he tied on the file, the bottle of oil and a note, and felt them go up, one after another.

The singing began again. He glanced up and saw the window faintly illuminated, and thought—

"He's reading the note now."

A moment later there was another tap on his hat, and his fingers found the cord with a slip of paper attached. He tore it off and put it into his pocket.

The singing had stopped. He waited a moment to see whether it would begin again. It did, but this time it was a whistle, "The End Of A Perfect Day". He lurched to his feet and dropped his rifle with a clatter.

That was their signal. She parted hastily from the sentry and hurried over.

"Pig! Drunken fool! High time you woke up. No thanks to you, I saw the

murderer. *Pues*, no, it wasn't your fault I didn't have all my walk for nothing and the whole *población* laughing at me."

"WE BROUGHT it off!" she whispered as they lurched around the corner into the Calle Bolivar. "Oh, Pat!"

They giggled and laughed hysterically. They reminded each other of things the sentry had said and leaned against the wall of the prison to laugh all over again. Nobody who saw them could have doubted the genuineness of their condition.

Under a flare they read Maxton's message, Faith standing on tiptoe with excitement. It was just one word, hastily penciled on a scrap of newspaper, "Thursday".

"Day after tomorrow!" Standish looked at her with his pulses pounding. "Faith, we're going to get away with it."

"Aren't we though!" Her eyes were starry. "Oh, Pat, wasn't it fun? I never had so much fun in my life. Listen, he told me . . ."

Presently, when both of them had steadied down a little, he remembered something.

"But what did he mean by that thing he was singing just as we left—you know—'If I had the wings of an eagle'?"

She gave his hand a little squeeze.

"Silly! What would you have done without me? He hasn't any way to get down, of course. He wants us to bring him a rope. Oh, Pat, what fun it is!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A GUARD DOES HIS DUTY

THERE was plenty to do in the next two days. In the excitement on which he had been living since they had determined on the attempt at rescue, Standish would have found it hard to give himself up to nervous waiting, but Faith obviated the necessity for that. She pointed out that she was leaving the *estancia*, at least until the revolution was over, and that one could not just go off and leave a house that way. Things had to be taken care of.

And so, under her direction, and with Ramón's help he made boxes, and she packed them with silver, the orders and decorations from the glass case in the living room, family records of the Espinozas, valuables of all sorts. Later, when it was dark, they took them out and buried them ten paces east of the water tank—he made a note of the spot—and replaced the sods carefully.

The work gave him little time to worry. When he did think, consciously, of anything except hammering, sawing, shoveling, stripping pictures from the walls, he fastened his mind to a picture of Maxton cutting steadily at the bars that stood between him and freedom.

His mind leaped over doubts and obstacles now. There simply could not be any slip after the start they had made. Everything would go like clockwork.

The very simplicity of the thing made it certain of success, he told himself. When Maxton was ready, he would tie the rope to his cord, Maxton would haul it up, make it fast and slide down. Once out of town the horses would be waiting—good horses, Ramón assured him, as good as any in the country—and then let luck do its worst. With horses and rifles and money they would be ready for anything.

As before, Faith would take care of the sentry. He had no doubts of her ability to do that now. And if by any chance, not that he thought it possible for a moment, the man should hear a sound and become suspicious, well, so much the worse for the sentry.

Altogether he was very much pleased with himself, and his admiration for Faith's cleverness and courage had reached the point of worship.

Thursday evening came at last. All the afternoon he had watched the sun crawl across a sky of brass and slide lower to the horizon, until at length it disappeared and the west was flooded with red. Then the red faded little by little and the stars came out, pale at first but

growing more brilliant while he watched.

Faith came out just as the twilight was deepening to sapphire. He looked at her a little surprised.

"Aren't you dressed yet? Your sentry vamping clothes?"

She laughed.

"Why, Pat, it won't be time to start for another two hours. Why, my goodness, you're all ready!" She had noticed the bulge of the rope coiled around his waist under his coat.

"Well, I had to do something to pass the time." He looked at his watch. "I guess it is kind of early—but hadn't you better go in and start getting ready? We don't want to take any chances."

"Don't you like me this way?"

He looked at her hungrily.

"Ah, Faith! I—if I—"

For an instant he almost forgot his resolution, but she understood and parried the look in his eyes swiftly.

"Thanks, I don't want to put my head in that shawl again till I have to," she told him with a nervous giggle. "I've been washing it ever since—my hair, I mean."

"You poor kid—" he had hold of himself again now—"I guess it's pretty bad."

"Well, kind of. Listen, Pat, does it make me perfectly hideous? Oh, I know it does, of course. You needn't be polite."

"Nothing could make you look anything but lovely, Faith."

She was silent a moment.

"I can't bear to have—Jerry see me like that," she said.

There was a note of warning, of caution in it. He caught it.

"He won't mind," he told her, but somehow he had the feeling that it was not Maxton she was thinking of, and his heart sang.

IT WAS nearly ten o'clock before they left the house. Ramón had brought the horses up to the patio with an extra one for Maxton. The sight of that extra horse, with the saddle pockets stuffed full full of provisions and equipment for the journey, and the blanket rolled on the cantle, affected Standish like a tonic. It made the whole thing seem so much more tangible.

Faith was quiet. She did not speak as he took her little foot in his hand and and tossed her into the saddle, but as they rode out of the gate and past the flowering shrub that filled the night with its spicy tang, she turned.

"Goodby, Don Diego," she called softly. "Goodby, dearest. I—" there was a little catch in her voice— "I'll try to be as fine and kind and strong as you'd want me to be." She blew a kiss toward the empty house. "It's been a lovely home," she said, and turned her face toward Encarnación.

Once again they left the horses with Ramón at the edge of town. Once again they passed on foot through the troubled dark of the street where the well-to-do tradesmen lived. This time there were two more looted houses, empty shells with a graveyard look about them and the smashed fragments of things strewn in front. Once he stumbled over a little toy cart, and he hurried on without saying anything, moved by a vague desire not to let Faith see it. In his mind it had a troubling significance.

It seemed to him that the crowd in the plaza was wilder than it had been two days ago, and its mood seemed less good natured. Strung up as he was to a high point of tension, he seemed to sense a general atmosphere of expectancy, a feeling that something was going to happen. He noticed a good many Indians, too, in from the mountains and the back country. They were everywhere, tall, thin faced, somberly drunk, stalking among the smaller, more festive plainsmen with a snarling scorn.

Another thing struck him forcibly. In the past forty-eight hours a fashion seemed to have started among the women for wearing cartridge belts and carrying rifles. Nearly all the painted, hip swinging girls who strolled through the mob were so equipped. It made him think of

things he had read of the French Revolution, and the thought was not a comforting one.

He breathed more freely when they crossed the plaza and came into the empty dark of the Calle Bolivar.

Faith had come through the ordeal of the crowd with more confidence this time, but he could feel that she was nervous, and as they came under the dark loom of the prison she whispered—

"Oh, I hope it's the same sentry as the last time!"

He stopped and drew her into the shadow of the wall.

"Let's run over this once again," he told her, as much to relieve his own tension as to steady her. "Just so there won't be any chance of a slip-up. We'll wait by the corner till he comes under the light. If it's the same one, you go ahead and meet him alone. You've given your husband the slip and come back for the sake of his *beaux yeux*. Get him away from Jerry's window and I'll do the rest."

She nodded.

They had already been over it a dozen times.

"You can leave that to me. I don't think I'll have any trouble, if it's the same one."

"Well, if it isn't, we'll work the same thing we did night before last. It ought to be good for once more. But if anything should happen—if he should get suspicious—try to back him up to where I am by the wall." He felt of the blackjack in his sleeve. "And you can leave *that* to me," he added grimly.

"Oh, I hope it won't come to that," she whispered tensely. "But if it does come to the worst you can count on me for my part."

Something in her tone made the realization of what he was leading her into sweep over him like a cold wave, and for an instant it was on the tip of his tongue to abandon the whole thing. But the thought of Maxton, waiting, stiffened his resolution, and he said—

"All right then—let's go."

CROUCHED in the darkness at the corner of the prison building, with Faith's hand tense on his arm and the flutter of her breathing next his ear, he ran the plan over again in his mind in a desperate search for flaws.

He shut his teeth stubbornly. The thing could not miscarry, that was all.

His leg, doubled under him, began to ache with cramp. He kept still as long as he could stand it, and them moved it. The tiny cracking of his knee joint startled him like a pistol shot.

Faith's hand on his shoulder tightened. From the darkness in front there came the padded shuffle and flap of bare feet on pavement.

The man came on, pacing easily, humming a little song. Ten feet from their corner he stopped, and for a moment there was no sound. Then he spat, shifted his rifle to the other shoulder with a click and a snap, and strolled off in the other direction.

The footsteps receded slowly. For a long minute they waited, eyes and ears straining into the darkness. Then he showed against the light, a short, stocky figure, and Faith let out a long breath.

"It is!" she gasped. "It's the same one. Oh!"

The whole blanket of numbing doubts that Standish had been fighting was swept away on the instant. Luck was on their side.

"Come on!" he told her, and began to crawl forward, feeling his way along the wall.

He had judged the distance from the corner to Maxton's window at about thirty feet. It seemed as though he had gone four times that before his fingers, groping feverishly, found the cord and gave it a gentle tug. There was an answering pull from above, and then another.

"It's all right," he breathed in her ear. "He's waiting."

She slipped past him. Then he saw her against the light and heard the patter of her *alpargatas* as she hurried to overtake

the sentry. He must have heard her at almost the same time, for he wheeled and challenged.

There was a little, soft laugh. "Señor, don't shoot me, please. It is I, señor—Mariquita."

The man laughed in his turn and lowered his rifle.

"*Ce!* little one—you again? And who did you walk ten miles through the dust to see this time, eh?"

Standish heard her giggle. A moment later they had disappeared in the shadow by the wall, and their voices were an indistinguishable murmur.

He was already unwinding the rope from about his waist, hurrying desperately, mentally cursing the way his fingers fumbled it. Ah! Free at last! He groped for the cord, tied it on, and gave it a little jerk.

Two tugs from above answered him. The rope began to slide upward through his fingers. He let it run, holding it clear of the wall so that there might not even be the faint sound of its rubbing against the stonework.

It stopped at last. Then there was a wait, and he thought:

"He's making it fast now. Why the devil doesn't he hurry?"

From above he heard a little scuffling, scraping sound, the sound of a heavy body being dragged over stone. His lips formed tense words:

"Quiet! Oh, quiet!"

Once there was a faint *cre-e-a-k* as the rope took the strain, and once a tiny click as a shoe hit the wall. He glanced in a taunt agony at the shadow that hid Faith and the sentry.

There was a dark loom right at hand, a slither, a little thump as the form dropped off the rope and to the pavement. He put out his hand and touched an arm.

"Jerry!"

Immediately the man whirled and got him by the throat. There were shouts. Half a dozen others surged up out of the hot dark and flung themselves on him. He heard Faith's terrified scream. He twisted—kicked—tore—snatched at his blackjack. Something hit the back of his head like a clap of thunder. Stars exploded and sang before his eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII

STONE WALLS

STANDISH came to himself, sick and dizzy, full of pain which presently localized in the back of his head. He put his hand up and felt bandages, and presently, exploring cautiously, found a lump that seemed as large as an egg. Then his fingers touched something wet and mushy and he jerked them back. His first thought was that his skull was cracked and that these were his brains oozing out. When he made the discovery that it was wet lint, the relief almost made him sick.

Slowly, he began to realize his surroundings. The first thing that attracted his attention was a patch of sky, already gray with the coming dawn. He stared at it, blinking, for a moment before he saw that he was looking at it through a narrow, barred window. Then a door caught his eye, a heavy, iron affair, studded with bolts, with a little grating in the upper panel. He began to understand that he was in prison, but at the moment, shaken as he was and racked by the pain in his head, he hardly cared.

Then he remembered Faith and groaned aloud.

Later a face peered at him through the grating, and immediately after, with a heavy clashing of bolts and bars, the door opened and a guard came in. He was a tall, heavy shouldered man with narrow eyes and a stupid, full lipped mouth. Standish noticed that before he came in he unbuckled his pistol belt and left it outside.

At the time, he wondered apathetically why he did that. Later he found out that it was because he was supposed to be a prisoner of importance, and a particularly desperate one, with whom they were taking no chances. Evidently it was thought that he might try to snatch

the pistol and try to shoot his way out.

The guard brought a bowl of stew and a tin mug of water. He set them on the floor near the pile of straw where Standish lay.

The sight of food turned him sick, but he drank the water greedily.

The guard proved talkative. He spoke a little English and seemed glad of a chance to air it.

"Ha! How you feelin'? No so good, eh?"

"What happened?" Standish wanted to know.

"What 'appen? *Ce!* Thass fonnee. Yes'day *capitan* is findin' thees Herrie Max'on performin' hole een he's weendow bar. *Sí*, thass right. Beeg 'ole—mos' through. So 'e's findin' also that letter which you write. So 'e's puttin' thees Herrie Max'on een 'nother cell, an' 'e's waitin' there till you come." He broke off, chuckling. "*Por dios!* Feller which slide down tha rope an' catch you, thass me!"

Standish felt too sick and miserable to care much. The whole business had been a failure, then, before they had even left the *estancia*, and he wondered now how he had ever thought it could be anything else.

He nerved himself to ask the question that had been torturing him since early this morning.

The guard grinned delightedly.

"*La mujer? Pues*, safe like an angel een heaven." He laughed, hugely pleased with his own humor. "You ain' got not'ing to worry 'bout. She's go'n' be there when you wantin' 'er—she ain' goin' nowheres. *Sí*, locked-up—snaap—like so. She's awright."

"In prison? Here?"

The guard jerked his thumb toward a different part of the building.

"You bet. Locked up—snap! Ain' got no more chance to get out than spite o' hell."

He had known it from the first, of course, but hearing the words stunned him heart and head.

"What are they going to do with us?" he asked weakly.

The guard grinned again.

"I dinno. The shoots maybe. Maybe —" he drew his hand across his throat with a sound like "*hllew*".

Standish turned his face to the wall, slack all over.

The hours wore away. At noon he was fed again, and managed to eat a little of the coarse stew, which, while it was unappetizing, made him feel a little stronger.

At four, the doctor came to look at his head. He was a man of forty or so with a fine, square face and a manner professionally courteous. He apologized for the intrusion and went to work quickly to take off the bandage and examine the wound.

As he worked Standish began to realize something of his own importance as a prisoner. Evidently this sort of medical attention was something out of the ordinary, for this man was skillful and quick and obviously well bred, not at all the type of prison doctor one might have expected in a place like Encarnación.

He ventured to ask him about it.

"You are not the regular prison physician, *señor medico?*

The other did not stop his work.

"No, señor, my practise is private."

"Then why are you taking care of me?"

"By request of the Revolutionary Committee, señor."

"Oh! So I shall be sure to be well enough to be shot?"

The doctor evaded.

"I am happy to say there is no danger. Your hat protected you, evidently." He drew a roll of sterilized gauze from his bag.

"I'm certain to be shot, I suppose?" His voice was harsh with the effort of holding it steady.

The other hesitated.

"I fear so, señor," he said reluctantly.

Standish closed his eyes for a moment.

"But Señorita Reed—they wouldn't do anything to her, would they? Surely not—a woman, and the ward of Don Diego da Espinoza."

"I am not in the counsels of the Revolutionary Committee," the doctor said

gravely, but his tone told what the words did not.

Standish stared at him, shaken.

"But, *señor medico*, she is hardly more than a child. A young girl— Surely not. And she is an American citizen," he added desperately.

The doctor finished with the bandage and gave it a final adjusting pat.

"*Ce!* That will do well. By tomorrow you should be as comfortable as ever." Then, in answer to Standish's unspoken entreaty, he shook his head.

"Americans are not liked here in Quetzalpan, señor," he said unhappily. "I fear that her American citizenship, so far from helping just now, would harm her. She had forfeited it's protection by breaking the laws. I am sorry to give you pain, but I should be cruel to hold out false hopes. Still, as I say, I am not of the Revolutionary Committee. One never knows."

He snapped his bag shut and got to his feet.

"I wish you a very good day, señor, and—" evidently he was about to add some professional wish for his patient's recovery and thought better of it, for after a slight hesitation he finished— "and I hope the new bandages may make you more comfortable."

"Wait, please! I have a great favor to ask." He was trying to collect his thoughts and get them into some semblance of coherence. "Please would you take a message for me to the Revolutionary Committee? Tell them—tell them that she had absolutely nothing to do with it, planning it or carrying it out. Tell them I can prove that if they will give me a chance." He had no possible idea how he was going to do that, but he would have time to think up something. "I arranged it all, and the whole fault was mine. Will you tell them that?"

The doctor nodded gravely.

"I shall be glad to carry such a message," he agreed. "But I fear I can not advise you to hope that anything will come of it. *Adios, señor,* and—my sympathy and my compliments."

THE LITTLE square of barred window grayed again. The gray deepened to purple. A different guard brought supper, one who scowled, thrust the stuff at him, and departed without speaking. Presently the lights went on in the corridor and the grating became a checkered square of yellow.

He felt stronger now. The dizziness and nausea were gone, although his head still ached with a dull, throbbing pain. He got up at length and went over to the window.

It opened on a courtyard. Opposite, another wing of the prison went up in row upon row of barred windows like his own. He wondered whether one of them could be Faith's. He tried to concentrate on a telepathic message to her and watched the windows for a time in some vague hope of seeing a flutter of white at one of them.

Presently he began to examine his own window bars. They had a curious fascination for him, although he could hardly have said what he hoped for. Even if one of them should be loose, even if he could get through the window, he had no way of letting himself down into the courtyard below. Still, it was something to do, to keep his mind occupied.

He looked at them more closely. They were rusted a little, he noticed, and he wondered whether they did not sometimes rust through before any one happened to discover it. Perhaps if he could chip off some of the flakes of rust—

His knife had been taken from him while he was still unconscious. So had his watch—he had read of men making a file out of a watch spring—and everything else he owned. They were taking no chances, evidently. It struck him as an absurdity to go to so much trouble over a man just to shoot him.

He turned his attention to the bars again. There were three of them, about six inches apart. He wondered about that rust. It might go almost all the way through, he thought, and no one would notice.

On a sudden he gripped one of them, set his feet and gave a quick wrench.

Was he mistaken, or had it moved a little?

Breathing quickly, he took a fresh hold, braced his feet against the wall, and heaved, strained—

He let go of the bars as suddenly as he had snatched at them, for the horror of that first night in prison at Juarez had come back to him, that night when he had wrenched and torn at the unyielding steel until Maxton had brought him out of his madness. He had supposed that it was impossible for a thing like that to happen twice to a man, but here he had been within an ace of it.

The exertion had set his head to throbbing again. He walked over to the pile of straw in the corner and sat down, weak and sweating.

THE SECOND day passed like the first, except that the doctor did not come again. The same guard who had told him of Faith's arrest brought him breakfast.

"She's still 'ere," he told him as he set the dishes down. He laughed heartily, pleased with his joke. "She ain' goin' nowheres," he added and laughed again. "An' that Herrie Max'on, 'e's still 'ere," he added again, when Standish did not answer. "Ha! Was me slidin' down tha rope alla time. Thass biggest theeng I ever see."

"You've seen her?" Standish wanted to know. He was careless of any rebuff if he might get some news of Faith.

The guard's eyes opened wide. They narrowed again as he grinned.

"*Pues*, me? Nossir. Thass ladees' side ove' there—*las mujeres*. Me, I don' go there. But you don' worry. She's there awright."

He had another piece of news to tell. The revolutionary forces of Encarnación were beginning to move today.

Sí, they goin' on—what et's call' railro'."

"Where are they going?" Standish asked. Not that he cared, but just to be thinking of something outside his own wretchedness for a little.

He jerked a thumb.

"Down country—Ciudad Luiz—I dinno. Gon' give tha damn' P.A. good lickin' I bet you. Then ev'bodee happee, eh? No gotta work no more."

"You think so, do you?"

"Sure, you bet. No gotta work no more'n spite o' hell. Thass feller Morales, he's fine feller—rich feller. Got five t'ousand pesos w'at 'e's gonna give it all to poor pipple. *Pues, sí;* gon' take alla tar pool away from damn' P. A, give it all to poor pipple. Thass nize, eh?"

Standish agreed vaguely rather than argue. He was thinking of the feverish excitement, the tense expectancy that he had seen in the plaza night before last. So that was what it meant—those Indians coming in, too—that the army was going to move. Ciudad Luiz. He had hardly thought of that for days. Or the P. A. Or the man who was impersonating him . . .

Oh, well, what difference did any of it make now?

He passed most of the day at the window, hoping against hope that in one of the windows opposite he might catch a glimpse of Faith. It was unlikely, of course, but there might just be a chance, and if there was, he could not bear the thought of missing it.

When night came and nothing had happened he sank into a state of dull hopelessness.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE ARMY OF ENCARNACÍON

AT A LITTLE after nine o'clock the next morning, the door opened and four soldiers came in. In these days any change from the regular routine was cause for alarm and this was all the more so when they ordered him to get up and come with them.

He tried to ask where they were taking him, but one of them prodded him in the

back with the muzzle of his rifle and ordered him to come along.

Outside the door two fell in in front of him, and two behind. He wondered whether he could be going to a firing party. He thought not, since he had had no trial, in fact had seen no one but the guards and the doctor since his arrest. More likely the latter had taken his message to the Revolutionary Committee, and they were sending for him to cross-examine him on it. The idea was terrifying. He had counted vaguely on time to prepare a story which would let Faith out, and he was not ready with it yet. He tried to think what he was going to say, to fit words and phrases together.

They went down a long corridor, past rows of doors, down a flight of stairs, another corridor, another flight of stairs, and halted under an archway in the courtyard that he had seen from his window. Backed up to the archway was a prison van, almost exactly like the police patrols at home, except that this one was old and decrepit and drawn by horses. And into it he was thrust, accompanied by proddings of the non-commissioned officer's rifle.

The interior was half dark and smelled of horses and old leather. There were two seats, running lengthwise, and, moved by some undefined instinct to efface himself, he slid along one of these and sat down in the farther corner.

A moment later another prisoner was thrust in, an elderly, rather fat man. Standish judged him to be a prosperous business man of the neighborhood by the cut and quality of his clothes, although at present his linen was dirty and he had a heavy growth of grizzled stubble. He slumped on the seat, his eyes staring and his face twitching. When Standish spoke he looked at him vacantly and his mouth worked, but no sound came out.

The next arrival was heaved in bodily, protesting. He was a thin faced young man with close set eyes and squirrel teeth. He dropped indignantly to the seat next the fat man and, noticing Standish, said—

"Another American, eh?" He spoke English with no trace of accent; in response to Standish's look of surprise he added, " 'S all right. I'm American myself, brother—born down here though. It's come to a hell of a pass where they can jail an American citizen like this, is what I say."

"Have you any idea where we're going?" Standish asked.

"Me? No, I haven't got any idea. Say, looka there, will you!"

A young woman had just been thrust in, in a violent fit of hysterics. The guards pushed her down on a seat where she proceeded to go rigid and quivering, with her feet stretched out into the aisle, and to give vent to a succession of long, shuddering sobs.

He jerked a thumb at her.

"Say, that's an outrage, what I mean," he announced. "Handling a woman like that. How 'bout it?"

He looked at Standish inquiringly.

"Yes—I don't know—I suppose so." A sound outside had set his pulses pounding. He was staring at the door.

The next instant he was on his feet.

"Faith!"

She was standing in the door, a little frightened, puzzled and bewildered by the half darkness. Then she saw him and stumbled forward, and he caught her, so that for just an instant she was half laughing and half crying against his shoulder.

"It's all right," he was trying to comfort her. "It's going to be all right."

"Oh, it doesn't matter. I swear it doesn't."

The thin faced young man raised his brows.

"Don't it?" he remarked ironically. "Well it matters a whole lot to me. I'll tella cock eyed world. These revolutionaries are ruinin' this country."

As they did not answer he repeated it in Spanish for the benefit of the others, and looked around him for confirmation. The fat man stared dumbly and the young woman burst into a renewed fit of sobbing.

Two more men stumbled in, one with his arm in a sling. The thin faced man spoke to them both. The wounded man leaned back with his eyes closed, very white.

"It's a damn' dirty shame, what I mean, to crowd a man that's hurt in here," the thin faced man declared. "If I had my way there's somebody'd get what's comin' to 'em for this. How 'bout it?"

"It seems pretty tough," Standish agreed absently. He and Faith were watching the door, hoping against hope that the next arrival might be Maxton.

"You bet it's tough. What I'd like to do to some o' these birds is a plenty."

There was only one place left in the van. They almost held their breaths as the door opened again.

IT WAS MAXTON. At sight of them he grinned ruefully.

"Hello, the gang's all here. Goodness gracious, Red, I thought you had more sense than to let him do it."

"Let him do what?" the thin faced man demanded inquisitively, as they caught Maxton's hands and drew him down into the seat beside Faith.

Maxton looked him over coolly.

"Oh, you there? Why, let him ride backward that way with the draft on him. That satisfy you?"

The thin faced man said:

"Aw what's the use of bein' snooty? We're all in the same boat, ain't we?"

At that moment the van lurched ahead and clattered over the cobbles of the prison yard, and the hysterical young woman moaned and stiffened with a long shudder.

"Got any idea where they're takin' us?" Maxton wanted to know as they rolled out of the gate into the dirt street.

Standish shook his head.

"I thought maybe you'd know."

He did not intend Faith to see the look that accompanied the words, a questioning look, but she got it in spite of him.

She caught a hand of each of them—she was sitting between them—and held it in a quick, firm grip.

"It doesn't matter," she told them. "So long as they let us stay together it doesn't *matter*, do you hear?"

Maxton said:

"I don't believe it's anything like that, yet anyhow. They'd make more of a fuss over us if it was. You see," he added a little apologetically, "I'm a kind of important fella just now."

The thin faced man said:

"Well, wherever they're takin' us, it's a damn' outrage, what I mean. This business has shown me one thing: There's only one crowd that can run this country and run it right, and that's the P. A." He paused and looked at Standish. "Ain't that so, brother?"

"I don't know," Standish said. He did not want to get into a political argument; he wanted to talk to Faith, but the man kept looking at him as if he expected an answer, so he went on, "I suppose there's something to be said—"

A warning glance from Maxton stopped him. The latter drawled:

"Shut up, Ace. 'Member tellin' me one time I had a spy mania?

"Well, I seem to be gettin' it again."

The thin faced man bristled.

"Who you callin' a spy?" he demanded.

"You," Maxton told him coolly. "I'd have spotted it before, only you were so thick headed about the way you went at it that I didn't figure you could be."

He raised his voice above the rattle of the van and spoke in Spanish.

"Be careful what you say," he warned the others. "This man is a police spy."

The others stared at him dully. The thin faced man said—

"All right, have it your own way." He settled back with an insulted look.

For perhaps a quarter of an hour the van jolted over the rutted street. Then it stopped and a soldier opened the door at the back and peered in. He shut it again and they could hear an argument

of some sort. Standish bent his head to Faith's ear and whispered:

"Don't admit anything. If there's any talking, let Jerry or me do it."

A moment later the door opened again and they were ordered out.

The van had been backed up to a long, red brown shed, with a high, barbed wire fence on either side. Something about the place struck him as vaguely familiar. Then, beyond the end of the shed, Standish saw a string of flat cars, and he recognized it. It was the freight station where they had first come into Encarnación.

They were lined up, two abreast. Maxton was with Faith, and he found himself beside the fat man, who appeared to be a little recovered from his paralysis of terror now that it seemed they were not going to be shot out of hand. The thin faced man had already disappeared in the crowd, probably, he thought, to go back and come down with another load.

A file of soldiers fell in on either side, and they were marched through the shed, past the platform where Maxton had asked the fat checker for work the night they arrived. Standish looked to see whether he was still there, but he did not find him.

THE YARDS were a bedlam. Soldiers hurried to and fro on mysterious errands which seemed to have no visible result. Women thronged around the cars, waving and shrieking. Here a sweating gang heaved boxes on a flat car, careless how or where they landed; there a dozen men panted and yelled and cursed as they urged a heavy wagon up an improvised ramp; farther down the line another crowd was making heavy weather of loading horses. Locomotives charged up and down, clanging their bells without regard for the people swarming over the tracks.

An angry looking civilian, very hot and flurried, came up with a list in his hand and shouted at the officer in charge of the prisoners. An argument followed which entailed a great deal of shouting and waving of arms and shaking of fingers under noses. The civilian made a final gesture which abolished the officer and his prisoners from the face of the earth and rushed away to where another string of loaded wagons had just come in.

The officer snapped an order and they were marched across the tracks to an empty box car. Another officer appeared, evidently of higher rank than the first, and ordered them back where they had started from. They went back. The perspiring civilian arrived after a five minutes' wait, and there was another argument.

In all they made three false starts, but eventually they found the car they were to occupy and were herded in.

It already held some twenty people, men and women, in all stages of terror and dejection. They made what room they could for Faith and the two men sat down, one on either side of her. She looked very little and white and tired, so that to look at her brought a lump into Standish's throat.

He said:

"Oh, Faith, I can't bear to think of it. We've brought you nothing but trouble ever since we came."

"Hush, Pat! That's absurd."

"But it's true," he persisted miserably. "First Don Diego, and now this."

"Hush, Pat. No one ever had better friends. Nothing else matters."

The day wore on, but there was no start. Locomotives clanged and snorted. Wagons creaked. Boxes bumped and clattered. Men ran up and down yelling orders, cursing, arguing. There was all the tumult and confusion of an untrained, undisciplined force getting under way.

As the sun rose higher and beat on the roof the inside of the car became stifling. To the lingering scents of tar and sheep dip and fertilizer there was added the smell of hot, perspiring humanity, and for their further discomfort, and for no other reason that any one could see, the car door was opened only a few inches.

Maxton tried argument and persuasion with the sentry, without result. The best he could get was a promise to speak to the officer when he came, but as no officer had come near them so far and none seemed likely to, there was small comfort in that.

At noon a detail passed with a hand cart and pitched in half a dozen loaves of greasy bread and set a bucket of water and a tin cup on the floor. Maxton took charge of this last, not without a good deal of angry protest from some of the others, and doled it out in small rations.

The car grew hotter, and the wounded man began to babble deliriously. They did what they could to make him comfortable, which was not much. Some of the prisoners moved about restlessly in the cramped space between the legs of the others, who snarled at them to keep still. A few talked with each other in low, dejected tones. The wounded man raved and thrashed. From time to time Maxton doled out a little of their precious supply of water and Faith wet the strip she had torn from her dress and laid it over the man's forehead to try to keep the fever down.

Standish helped her. None of the others paid any attention, except that there were a few grumbles about the use of so much water. Each one seemed to be entirely centered on his own wretchedness. Self had become terribly important. He wondered whether it was only the fact that there were three of them together that broadened their own horizon by that much and kept Faith and Maxton and himself from feeling the same way.

It was late that afternoon when a sudden confusion broke loose outside—yells, screams, locomotive whistles, the clanging of bells, and a fusillade of shots. A crashing jar threw those who were standing off their feet. There was a series of jerks, a grinding, the clatter of wheels over switch points, while the yells redoubled and the whistles clamored.

The revolutionary army of Encarnación was on its way.

CHAPTER XXIX

DESPAIR

ALL NIGHT the train roared and swayed and pounded through the darkness, while the prisoners slept uneasily, moaning and stirring, and the young woman who had been hysterical in the van broke into occasional spasms of racking sobs. From time to time the fat man prayed with noisy vehemence. The wounded man raved and tossed. Toward morning he died, and Standish was horrified to find himself grateful for the relief of not having to listen to him. Shortly after he fell into a restless sleep.

He opened his eyes to find that it was day and that the train was standing still. He had dozed off sitting against the wall, and he had a crick in his neck besides being stiff and sore all over.

Faith was still asleep, her head pillowed on his coat. In the cumbersome clothes of a peon woman, with the shawl half hiding her face, she looked small and pathetic. He longed to take her in his arms, to hold her and comfort her as best he could. It seemed incredible that Maxton, who could, did not take the opportunity.

One by one the others began to stir. He found himself watching their faces with morbid fascination. First there would be the stupor of sleep, then a dull bewilderment, and then a quick terror as they recognized their surroundings and realized where they were. After that most of them settled down to a helpless dejection.

Standish found himself beginning to wish that they would hurry and shoot him and get it over. Somehow he was becoming reconciled to that, even for Faith.

Feet crunched on the cinders outside. The car door opened wider and an officer put his head in and ordered every one out.

Standish touched Faith on the shoulder, hating to wake her. She opened her eyes and smiled up at him sleepily.

"What is it, Pat?"

"I don't know. They've just told us we've got to get out."

She sat up and threw the shawl back from her head.

"All right. Just one second." She spent it in fluffing out her hair with her fingers, tucking in little stray strands, and then looked ruefully at her hands. "I wonder if they'll ever be clean again. And my face must be just grimy. Oh, never mind; don't tell me. Come along."

People were already climbing out of the car. Standish and Maxton jumped down and lifted Faith after them. Two others brought out the man who had died during the night and laid him on the ground. No one appeared to notice him or said anything. It was as if there were a tacit agreement to ignore it.

The train stood on a sidetrack in the middle of a gray waste of sand and sage.

"Looks to me like the Llano Desapiadado. If that's right there's no water in fifty miles. I reckon there's no danger of anybody tryin' a break here," Maxton said.

Standish looked at him with a little shock of surprise. In the past twenty-four hours the hope of escape, the thought of it even, had ebbed out of his mind, and its place had been taken by helpless resignation. It was startling to find that Maxton was still weighing chances. It heartened him too.

They were waiting for the eastbound freight to pass, he learned presently, and the troops were already taking advantage of the delay to get breakfast. The nearby landscape was dotted with men hacking at the tough shrubbery for firewood.

It was unlike any army that he had ever imagined. They traveled in box cars or flats or gondolas. and there seemed to be as many women as men. Some of the women carried rifles and belts, like the girls he had seen in the plaza at Encarnación, but for the most part they seemed to have no particular status. Apparently they were simply following the army for excitement, and to be near their men.

There was no discipline and very little attempt at any. Every one took the affair as a gorgeous holiday. They laughed and joked and screamed at one another across the little fires that presently sprang up, or wrangled over priority at the cooking pots, while the officers wandered through the confusion looking as if they felt that something was wrong somewhere but were not quite sure what to do about it. Every third soldier seemed to have brought along his favorite game cock and the air was filled with the clamor of indignant roosters. Half starved dogs barked from the trucks or nosed through the crowd for scraps, while from the cars farther down the line the horses stamped and whinnied miserably.

PRESENTLY, under guard of half a dozen soldiers, the prisoners were set to gathering wood and building a fire in a place a little apart from the rest. They were given a bucket of water and a double handful of coarsely ground coffee together with a dozen loaves of greasy bread.

The water was just beginning to steam when a long drawn whistle sounded faintly through the thin air—the approaching eastbound. Standish watched it apathetically, a brown worm crawling toward them across the plain. He supposed that when it had passed they would start again, coffee or no coffee. He turned back to help Faith feed the blaze with bits of brush.

Instead of passing, the train ground to a stop, and the prisoners, relieved and suddenly more cheerful, crowded around the coffee, which was simmering. Standish got possession of the single cup and ladled out a cupful for Faith. He was handing it to her when a voice behind him drawled:

"Say, damn me! What you fellers doin' here?"

He turned to find a lank figure in overalls regarding him severely.

"Bill O'Day! Say—look here, Jerry—"

Maxton had come around the fire. They shook hands all around. Standish said:

"Faith, this is Bill O'Day. You know, down near Aguilar."

He did not dare say too much, for one of the guards had edged forward and was regarding the engineer suspiciously.

O'Day snatched off his cap and scrubbed his hand desperately against his trouser leg.

"I'm sure pleased to meet you, ma'am —damn me 'f I ain't. But what you-all doin' here?"

He looked at them suspiciously, and then at the guards.

"You boys done gone an' got yourselfs into trouble with these revoluters again!" he accused them. "After all I told you."

Maxton nodded.

"They got us."

"This lady, too?"

Standish said—

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"You know damn' well it's so." O'Day looked profoundly distressed. He glanced from one to the other unhappily. "That ain't no way to do," he said. "No way a-tall."

His brow furrowed.

"If I was runnin' your train—but I ain't. They got me on No. 4 yonder, goin' up."

"Cut it, O'Day!" Maxton glanced meaningly at the guards. "You can't do anything this time."

O'Day looked around him miserably. He looked at the guards, with their rifles, at the soldiers swarming up and down the length of the train.

"Yep, I guess it's *cuidado*," he agreed heavily. "There ain't a thing I can see to do. They even got a gang of revoluters ridin' my train, guardin' it. Hell, a lady, too!"

His eye, roving helplessly, fixed on the fire where the other prisoners were crowded around the coffee bucket waiting their turn at the cup.

"What's that?" he demanded.

"Coffee. Our breakfast," Standish told him.

The engineer stepped over and looked into the bucket. A look of partial relief overspread his face.

"You're a liar," he announced. "Breakfast, huh? Your breakfast is over yonder on No. 4, waitin' for you."

"Hold on!" Maxton told him as he turned. "It's mighty good of you, O'Day, but they won't give us time. They'll probably pull us out in a couple of minutes."

O'Day looked at him reprovingly.

"Not till I pull No. 4 past the end o' that sidin', they won't," he announced. "An' I'll pull it when I'm good an' ready. Un'stand? I'm runnin' that train, an' I'll pull it when I'm damn' good an' ready. An' not before."

HE STRODE off. Presently from the direction of No. 4 appeared the train crew, bearing a coffee pot, cups, tin plates, bread, and a huge pot which proved to contain baked beans. At the rear came O'Day, bearing a basin of hot water, a cake of soap, and a towel over his arm.

These he presented to Faith.

"I didn't know, ma'am, but you'd like to kinda freshen up some." He hesitated and his face went fiery red. "Not that you need it, o' course," he added hastily, "but I been married two-three times myself, an' I know how women are."

He set the basin on the ground, and delicately turned his back, while Faith, half laughing and half crying, knelt and plunged her hands into the water.

"Eat hearty!" he invited them, while the prisoners crowded in and the train crew dealt cups and plates and ladled out the beans. "It's on them revoluter guards. If they get hungry before we hit Medinas, they c'n set on the roof an' suck wind."

While they ate, he squatted on his heels between Maxton and Standish, and gave them such news as he had.

The revolution, it seemed, was winning all along the line. There had been some fairly heavy fighting near San Filipe, about fifty miles east of Ciudad Luiz, and

the federals were holding on desperately. They were heavily outnumbered, but they had some artillery.

"Six batteries." Maxton nodded. "Well, it's not much, but it'll help."

"Revoluters expects to be in Ciudad Luiz by the fifth, what I hear," O'Day observed. "I'm on my way up to Jenkinsville to take on a load of 'em now. Say, 'f I thought it'd do you boys any good, be damn' 'f I wouldn't ditch 'em." He looked at them inquiringly.

Maxton shook his head.

"For a fact, O'Day, there isn't a thing I can think of you could do that would help us. This isn't like Aguilar. By the way, did you have any trouble about that?"

"Why would I? Didn't nobody see me turn you loose but that spick boy o' mine that fires for me. An' he knows to keep his mouth shut. I learned him. Made considerable noise round the country, though—you gettin' loose—but that's all quiet now. Say, they found the fellers' 't killed this here Don Santiago—the one they was fixin' to put you through for. Bunch from La Boca, huntin' money."

Standish said:

"You know, I'll bet that was the same crowd that was chasing us. They were up in that direction."

"Might have been. They hung 'em anyhow. Well, I expect these revoluters is gettin' restless." He got to his feet. "I sure hate to leave you fellers, an' you ma'am, in any such mess as this. Damn me 'f I don't."

"Forget it, O'Day," Maxton told him; and Standish added:

"You don't wish you could help any more than we do. If you could get word to the U. S. consul at Juarez—although I don't suppose the Government would do much for us anyway, under the circumstances."

"Gov'ment don't seem to be doin' much round here these days," O'Day agreed gloomily. " 'Bout all the Americans has left. Well, g'by, ma'am, 's been a pleasure. S' long boys. Take care yourselfs. I'll do what I can, but—I wisht—well, I wisht—"

He strode off as suddenly as he had come, and presently No. 4 crawled off into the gray waste again.

CHAPTER XXX

ONWARD . . .

IT MAY have been O'Day's hot coffee and food, or it may have been the contact with the engineer himself. Something, at any rate, had brought about a change in Standish's state of mind. He had come out of the car dumb and driven as a steer in the stockyards, caring for nothing beyond the needs of the moment, regarding the future, if at all, with a sort of dull fear. He went back to it with a personality of his own, vividly aware of the situation, alive to the seriousness of it, and yet, somehow, not without an unreasoning hope.

Faith and Maxton seemed to feel the change too. All three showed it in a hundred little ways, but principally by the fact that shortly after the train started again they settled down for the first time to talk the situation over.

There were no euphemisms or evasions now. It was no use pretending that their case was anything but desperate, with the revolution winning all along the line and Morales expecting to be in Ciudad Luiz within two weeks.

"And when that happens the fun begins," was Maxton's prediction. "That's what we're bein' fattened for all right."

"Well, I don't suppose it's any worse being shot in Ciudad Luiz than anywhere else," Faith said. Her voice was steady.

"Look here, if they were going to shoot us, why would they bother to bring us all the way down here? Why go to all that trouble when they could have done it just as well back in Encarnación?" Standish suggested.

It sounded more hopeful now that he had said it, but Maxton promptly knocked the bottom out.

"Moral effect," he told him. "There'll

be a lot more kick to doin' it all fussy in Ciudad Luiz, after a victory, than slipshod up East."

"But they'll give us a trial, won't they? They've got to give us a trial."

"Oh, sure. They'll give us a trial. But they're not goin' to pass up anything as entertainin' as an execution just on that account. I'm not just sayin' this to spoil your fun," he added, "but you ought to understand this. There isn't a thing on earth to be hoped for from any trial—not for any of us. If we get out of this mess, it'll be by makin' a getaway, and any chance at all is a good chance."

Faith nodded soberly.

"That's understood, of course. Anything that looks like a chance. And now I want to say something. Please—*please*, don't think you've got to protect me. I mean that. I can go anywhere you can. That's agreed then?"

She looked from one to the other. Standish nodded, with mental reservations. Maxton crossed his heart and grinned.

"You know, Red, there's times when I actually like you a lot."

"It does seem kind of awful, though," she went on. "Butchered to make a Roman holiday . . ."

Standish squared his shoulders.

"Well, they haven't done it yet," he reminded them again.

AT NOON they discovered another reason why they had been brought down-country.

The train stopped at a small town—and for the second time in one day they were ordered out. This time it was not to eat. They were lined up with half a dozen guards on either side. A detatchment fell in ahead of them, and another in the rear, and a band struck up somewhere in front, a clashing, whining rhythm, underlaid with the heavy beat of a drum. As music it was nothing, but it had a savage, barbaric quality that went with the unkempt ranks and the ragged, shoeless soldiery.

They moved off up the dusty street, followed by a crowd of hangers on. Dogs barked, children whooped shrilly, the band crashed brassily, and people came to the doors to stare. Twice they made the circuit of the little plaza. They they halted in front of the church, and while the band continued to blare and pound the prisoners were pushed and prodded up the steps and into a line in front of the portico.

The troops stood at ease down below. The band played on until a crowd collected. Then it stopped and an officer, a heavy-set bull of a man, mounted the steps and began to speak.

It was a recruiting demonstration, with the prisoners as a part of the show. For an hour they stood there, while the officer harangued the crowd. Between speeches the band played. The sun blazed down and the air was lifeless and steamy. The prisoners shifted from one foot to the other and mopped their faces.

At first it was all oratory and music. The prisoners were no more than stage effects—scenery to dress the speaker's act. But now he gave them something to look at. He swept his hand and pointed to a man on the end of the line.

There, he announced, was a Lopezista spy, and the crowd gave vent to cheers. Another had been an instalment collector for a phonograph and furniture company. They knew what an installment collector was! And now he was going to Ciudad Luiz to pay another sort of installment to the revolution. The next—it happened to be the fat man, who shrank back, quivering—had supplied rifle ammunition, at a price, and had tried to palm off defective shells. Did they notice how his knees shook? Well, they would shake more before he was finished. All the ammunition of the revolution was not defective—*pues*, no!

There was laughter and jeering at that. They pushed in closer. This was the real show. This was drama.

He pointed out the young woman who had been hysterical in the prison van yesterday morning, and who now stood drooping in the iron sun glare, her mouth

open and her eyes vacant. She, it seemed, had a lover in the guard. She had been sending him letters, which probably contained a secret code.

There was an instant storm of hisses and catcalls. The guard was well hated for its police activities.

He went on through the group, picking out one after another, while his audience stared and exclaimed and elbowed and stood on tiptoe to get a better view.

And then, like a good showman who has built up carefully to his climax, he stepped aside so they could get a better view, and paused dramatically.

"And there—there he stands!" He waited until every eye was on Maxton and then lowered his voice impressively. "The *Yanqui* of the guard who killed Don José Ramirez!"

There was a hush. Then a rustling and a whispering swept across the square as wind sweeps across a forest. It grew and swelled, while the officer stood, still pointing, and Maxton looked out over the hostile faces with narrow, contemptuous eyes. The rustle rose to a mutter, to a growl, to a snarl. There was a quick scrape and shuffle of feet, moving in concert toward the steps.

Somewhere on the farther edge of the crowd a man picked up a stone and flung it. It hit the portico, well above their heads and, as if the crack of it had been a signal, the air was suddenly full of missiles that clattered against the stonework and dropped around them. Standish pulled Faith down against him, sheltering her head as well as he could with his arms.

From the bottom of the steps there were oaths, grunts, cries of pain, for the soldiers were using the butts of their rifles to control the crowd. Those nearest them shrank back a little, but the steady thrust from the rear carried them in again in spite of themselves. The fat prisoner had broken into frantic prayers. One of the women was screaming steadily.

A stone hit the officer. He staggered back with his hand to his face. A yell went up that changed to cries of fear as he jerked his pistol free and fired twice.

A man on the edge of the crowd pitched over sidewise and lay squirming, with his ear ground into the dust. That stopped the crowd, and the soldiers were able to clear the way.

Slowly, heaving and shoving and swaying, they moved off toward the railroad.

The whole distance was not over three hundred yards, but every foot of it was a nightmare to Standish. He had one arm over Faith's head and face, sheltering her as best he could, while the other steadied her and kept her on her feet. Maxton was on her other side. Twice he knocked a man back into the crowd, and once, when a yelling native clawed his way through the cordon and clutched Faith's shawl, he hit him across the mouth with the back of his hand.

It ended only when a band of reinforcements from the train held back the mob with stabbing gun muzzles. Then they scattered and drew off to content themselves with hoots and yells and volleys of stones that clattered against the car even when the prisoners were safely inside it again. The whole demonstration had been too successful.

AT DAWN they reached a little place called La Roca, and there the detachment entrained. The prisoners were marched to a shadeless spot a little apart from the unloading, and were being held there under guard.

"The miracle," Maxton said thoughtfully, "ain't that the army is lousy and sloppy, but that they ever got here at all. If this is the kind of an army that young fella Morales is winnin' with—and it is, of course—he's a sod buster and don't you forget it. Look at 'em."

Standish could see nothing of interest in the training and discipline of the revolutionary army just now, and said so.

Maxton sighed.

"You ain't a soldier, Ace. But it's liable to make a difference to you just the same."

"Why? Morales is bound to win."

"In the end, prob'ly. But he's liable to get a setback before he gets past the guard. And if he does, and we're anywheres near the front—"

Standish sat up suddenly and regarded the ragged troops with a new interest. Seen in the light of this possibility, they did look incredibly sloppy.

"Think they're going to take us near the front?" Standish asked.

Maxton's eyes narrowed, and indicated their revolutionary guard warningly.

"How do I know?" He changed the subject abruptly. "How you feelin', Red? Anything wrong?"

"No; a little tired is all. I didn't sleep much last night."

"You good for a march this afternoon?" he asked solicitously. "We'll be startin' pretty quick now."

"I've got to be, haven't I? I'll be all right. Don't worry."

Standish glanced down at her, and meeting her eyes for just an instant he had the actual physical feeling of having her in his arms. Then she turned her head, just a little, but enough to make him take his own eyes from her swiftly, for he knew she had felt it too.

"My Lord," he thought, "I mustn't make things any harder for her than they are."

He was feeling an almost tearful tenderness for her littleness and courage. Taking it quietly, resting, saving herself for the march and for their chance if it should come.

At noon they had coffee and bread. Shortly after, the unloading was finished and the column began to form. The guards ordered them up and marched them to a place just ahead of the wagons.

"You have plenty of room, señor," Maxton pointed out to the officer in charge of their detail. "Couldn't you let the women ride?"

The man favored him with a slow stare.

"War is war," he retorted. "Be still."

For half an hour they waited in the hard sunlight. It was a relief when there was a shouted command ahead and the units began to move out, one after the other.

All that afternoon they plodded steadily; plop and shuffle of feet ahead and the jingle and bump of wagons behind. There was a smell of parched earth. Leaves hung limp on the trees and the grass was brown and sere. All along the length of the column the hot dust hung motionless. It ground into their skins and caked on their faces. It gritted on their teeth and clogged their throats.

Standish watched Faith's feet, stockingless, grimed with dust, and he felt a helpless lump in his throat.

He squared his shoulders and set his will against a mad impulse to fling himself on the nearest guard. There was some better way than that; there had to be. He brought his mind back to the thought Maxton had given him this morning. If the revolutionaries should be defeated; if there should be a confused, hasty retreat . . . It wasn't enough to be called a hope, but . . .

"It's got to come. She can't have stood up to everything the way she has for nothing. It's bound to come," he tried to convince himself.

TO BE CONCLUDED

The ROAD to SANDOVAL

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

A Novelette of Stress and Ordeal on a Colorado Cattle Ranch

"RIDE 'em, cowboy," mourned Saguache Joe, as the freight jolted around a curve and Joe's sombreroed head was bumped against the box car roof. "Who'd have thought I'd ever have fell so low as to ride a side door Pullman like a common bum?"

As a matter of fact, Joe had a good excuse. He was on his way from Alamosa, Colorado, to a place called Sandoval, New Mexico. An hour before he had been traveling in the proper dignity of his kind, astride a long gaited roan mare, an A-1 stock saddle between his chaps. Of these cherished possessions he had been robbed. The thing had happened just as he was crossing the tracks at a lonely water tank. A masked man had stepped out from under the tank, presented two silent though convincing arguments, relieved Joe of his horse, his gun and the roll of bills on his hip. Then the fellow had ridden away into the night, leaving Saguache Joe standing boot deep in a snowdrift. It was in the dead of a hard winter and there had been long spiky icicles hanging from that water tank.

The first freight drag coming along and stopping for water happened to be a string of gondolas, mostly loaded with coal. Midway between engine and caboose, however, there chanced to be a single box car; into this Joe had found shivering entrance through a high end window. Being a cowboy, he easily discerned the nature of the car's cargo. It was quite dark in the car, but the feel and the smell of the cargo proved it to be cottonseed oil cake.

"Golly!" exclaimed Saguache Joe between chattering teeth. "I'll bet some cow outfit down the line'll sure be glad when this car o' cake is spotted on their-all's sidin'. This sure is starvation winter for cattle. What with the snow flag deep to the grama sod, I ain't seen a cow brute in two months what didn't look like a rail fence."

He made himself as comfortable as possible on top of the seed cake, which was sacked in hundred pound sacks and which filled the car to about two thirds of its height. Finally he excavated a few sacks and made a cave for his body, which helped to warm him. Then he felt in one of his boots. Sure enough, the sixty-five dollars emergency stake which he had always cached there as a habit was safe. This much had been salvaged from the bandit.

"It'll sure be a unlucky day for that jasper if I ever bump into him again," muttered Saguache Joe, "that is, if I knowed him, which ain't likely, seein' as it was plumb dark and he wore a mask."

With this reflection, Joe curled up in his cave to seek respite in sleep. Being a healthy young man, he attained that end. The freight rumbled on. Some time during the night it stopped. There was a good bit of backing and bucking, and clanking of coupling pins; but Joe slept so soundly he was not disturbed.

When he awoke a frostbit dawn was peeping through the cracks of the car walls. He heard no rumble of wheels; the car was perfectly still. Joe looked out. There was no other car in sight. Joe's car seemed to be spotted on a siding at a small, crossroads cow town.

Five minutes later the cowboy was making his way up the cinders toward a depot whose legend read:

PARKVIEW—COLORADO

Just why Joe could not understand, for if there were any park around, he failed to

view it. He saw snow covered and bushless flats in every direction except south. Far away to the south, white against a dun sky, arose a chain of box mesas.

The town itself was drab, unpainted and oppressively uninviting. No warmth of smoke arose from its chimneys to challenge the chill of the dawn. The place was asleep, with apparently no reason for waking up. Saguache Joe lumbered awkwardly along the cinders, his batwinged chaps flapping and his spurs clinking. He turned the collar of his sheepskin coat up until it touched the bottom of his sombrero brim. The holster at his belt was, of course, empty. Being bereft of both horse and gun made Joe feel as dismal as this dark gray dawn and as forlorn as this decrepit town.

Arriving at the depot, he found it tenantless, although the waiting room was unlocked. He entered the latter and found it comparatively warm, for the embers of the night's fire still remained in a big, barrel stove. A good place to loaf, thought Joe, till the town woke up.

He sat down and counted the sixty-five dollars that the bandit had overlooked. Anyway, he could get breakfast. After that he planned to invest his capital, if possible, in a second hand saddle and a cheap horse. Anything would beat riding a freight train, he mused, and moreover this railroad didn't go to Sandoval.

This latter fact was attested to by a system map on the waiting room wall. Joe examined the map, and after some search he put his finger on a dot marked, "Parkview".

"Not so bad," muttered the cowboy. "I see I'm not more'n fifteen-twenty mile north of the New Mexico line. And let's see, here's Sandoval, New Mexico. Almost due south of here about a hundred miles."

It was at Sandoval that Joe planned to meet three friends whom he hadn't seen for a long while, cronies by the cognomens of Steve Elkins, Hod Slavins and Four-finger Fox. Assuming that there was a road across the mesas, Joe figured he could make Sandoval in three days by saddle, in spite of the snow. He saw by the map that there was no practical rail route to Sandoval; such a trip would involve six times the direct distance and three changes. And if he bought a ticket he would have reduced his capital below the price of the cheapest kind of saddle and horse. When he joined up with his pals, Saguache Joe had no mind to be afoot.

A few minutes later a fattish, pleasant featured man of middle age entered the depot. Joe saw immediately by the legend on his cap that he was the agent.

"Howdy?" greeted the agent. "Waitin' fer a train?"

"Nope," responded Joe grinningly, thankful that his chaps and spurs hardly warranted any assumption that he was a tramp. "Just waitin' for the town to wake up so I can get breakfast. They got a beanery in this metropolis, have they?"

"Well," informed the agent doubtfully, as he opened the stove and began stirring its coals with a poker, "they's a sign a little ways up the street says 'Hotel'. Call it anything you want to. They start throwin' grub at seven A.M., and it lacks just five minutes of that now."

"I'll take a chance," answered Saguache Joe. "And while information's free, have they got a deadfall around here where I could trade somebody out of a cheap second hand bronc and saddle?"

"Johnson's livery," informed the agent, "three doors beyond the hotel."

"And a hardware store where I might talk 'em out of a shootin' gun?"

"Two doors beyond the livery," explained the railroad man, stoking the stove from the scuttle.

"And is they a road leadin' south out of here toward Nueva Mex?"

"Whereabouts in Nueva Mex?"

"Sandoval."

"Whewee! That's some trip in this snow," exclaimed the agent. "All of a hundred miles. But yes, they's a good road to Sandoval, and a low pass over the mesas. Enough travel on that road

to pack down the snow, too. And, come to think of it, plenty of ranches you could stop at."

"What ranches?"

"Eleven mile out you come to the Half Circle H. Four mile more and you hit the Soup Dish. Beyond that I can't call 'em," explained the agent.

"Thanks a heap," said Joe. "So long, *amigo*."

HE LEFT the depot and plowed his way across the street. Guided by the sign referred to by the agent, he made his way to a dilapidated structure, once a saloon but now a hotel and restaurant. He entered to find a row of frowsy tables and a fly specked, soup stained lunch counter. Joe seated himself at the latter. A waitress appeared from the rear. She was sleepy eyed, knock kneed and dish faced, not a day over forty-eight; her darkish hair had been the recent recipient of an unsuccessful application of peroxide.

She retreated with Joe's order of ham and eggs.

While she was gone a man descended some steps through a stair well which gave into the restaurant from the second floor. This customer, thought Joe, must have been a tenant for the night, recently arisen, because he was still buttoning his buckskin vest as he came down the steps. By boots, gun, spurs and hat he was a cowman.

Saguache Joe observed immediately that this fellow had come awake with a dark brown grouch. He did not greet Joe, as he should have done by all local conventions. He kicked one chair out of his way, snatched another one to a place at a table, slumped in it and then scowled a black scowl at the world in general. Any scowl he scowled was likely to be black, thought Saguache Joe, for it seemed to Joe that here was the blackest white man he had ever seen. His eyes and his tousled hair were black, jet black. He had not shaved, if even the day before, and the stubble on his jowl and cheek was as bristly black as the hair on the back of a Poland China barrow.

When the waitress came he snapped an order at her. That the waitress was afraid of him was attested by the manner in which she stood aloof from him, answering frightenedly—

"Comin' up, Mr. Riff."

"Somehow," muttered Saguache Joe to himself, "I don't just exactly cotton to this Mr. Riff. Somebody oughter stand him on his ear in a barrel of rain water and spin him around."

The ham and eggs arrived and employed Joe's interest. Just as he was finishing his breakfast the front door opened. In it stood the aimiable little agent from the depot across the street.

"I say, Riff," spoke the agent, "would you mind stoppin' in at the Half Circle H on your way home and leavin' a message?"

"What d'you think I am?" wheezed Riff peevishly. "I ain't no messenger boy for the Half Circle H. I ain't goin' home till late this afternoon, anyway."

Before this discourteous reply had been completed the agent espied Saguache Joe. Joe was strolling up to the cash register to pay his score.

"I say, podner," said the agent, addressing Joe, "I believe you said you was ridin' south. If so, you'll pass the Half Circle H eleven miles out. It's right on the main road. Would you mind leavin' a message?"

"Why," responded Joe with a broad grin," bein' sort of half way civilized, I wouldn't mind it a bit."

"Just leave word at the Half Circle H, then," requested the agent, "that a car of cotton seed oil cake, long overdue on account of misrouting, arrived last night and is spotted on the siding. I see by the B L that it's consigned to the Half Circle H, freight prepaid."

"I'll sure tell 'em," promised Joe, seeing no reason to mention that he himself had arrived in town aboard that same box car. "And I reckon they won't be mad, either. What with the sod all friz up with snow and ice, them Half Circle H cows ought to

be right cheerful to have this car o' cake troughed up to 'em."

"Say," wheezed the man Riff from his table, "where did that busted and broke down Half Circle H outfit get the price of a car o' cake? Sure it's for them?"

The agent turned from Joe, who was paying his score to the waitress, to Riff. Apparently the railroad man stood in no awe of Riff.

"I thought you weren't interested," he retorted. "You turned me down when I asked you a civil favor, so now what you hornin' in for? Yes, the car's for the Half Circle H, prepaid. I reckon Bert Hifeldt ordered it, and paid for it, before he died with your bullet in his stomach, Riff. I forgot about that shooting for a moment, else I wouldn't have insulted the Half Circle H by asking you to take the message."

Turning from the scowling Riff, the agent spoke again to Saguache Joe.

"Tell 'em I understand they're short handed some," he told Joe, "so I'll protect 'em on demurrage the best I can. Railroad oughtn't to kick if they take two weeks to unload that car, after the way it's been misrouted."

THE AGENT left the restaurant and crunched across the snow of the street to the depot. Joe, turning from the cash register, saw that Riff had arisen and was advancing bellicosely toward him.

"Who are you, anyway?" snarled Riff.

Joe did not forget that his gun holster was empty; therefore he chose to be diplomatic with Riff.

"I'm the gent," he replied amiably, "who chaperoned this car o' cake into town."

His grin did not wear well on Riff's temper.

"Don't get funny with me, cowboy," retorted Riff. "Who are you, where did you come from and where are you going?"

There is always a limit, and by Saguache Joe's ethics these insolent questions achieved such limit. Armed or unarmed, Joe felt that he had no choice but to reply:

"My name's Saguache Joe; I come from Alamosa; I'm goin' down the street to the hardware store to buy a gun. After that I'm gonna shoot a hole through the first ugly, black faced buzzard who asts me any more fool questions."

Under their bristly stubble Riff's jowls turned from black to purple. He whipped out a Colt .45 and jammed its muzzle into Joe's ribs.

"I'll kill you for that!"

Riff's threat was a shriek, echoed by the shriek of the homely waitress. From the kitchen in the rear a Mexican cook came running.

"You'll murder me, you mean," corrected Saguache Joe, forcing a calm voice although there was a chill creeping up the small of his back. "And that'd be bad judgment, because I see you got two witnesses. They'd testify I haven't a gun on me. Shoot me and hang, Riff."

This cold reminder very likely saved Joe's life. For Riff, after glaring at him a full minute, finally jammed the gun back in its holster.

Joe said:

"Wait about five minutes and you can have a even break. Watch me when I come out of the hardware store. I'll be heeled. You can cut loose then and no questions ast."

WITHOUT waiting for reply, Saguache Joe turned on his boot heels and left the restaurant. He went five doors down the snow packed walk to the hardware store. On the counter of this store the dealer began to show him various guns, new guns priced up to fifty dollars.

"Got anything second hand?" Joe asked. "I'm some short."

"Here's one," responded the merchant, "and a bargain. The bone is broke off one side of the grip. Cowboy bought it on time, nicked it all up, and then turned it in because he couldn't pay the balance. But the movement's as good as new. She's yours for ten dollars."

Joe tried the action and was pleased. He bought the gun. He also purchased a box of cartridges, put five of them where they would do the most good and belted the rest. He left the shop, having expended, in all, twelve of his sixty-five dollars.

He stepped out sidewise, facing alertly down the walk toward the restaurant. Riff, however, did not appear. Joe had hardly expected him to, for he had a hunch that Riff was yellow. After waiting what he considered a decent and dignified interval, Joe passed on two doors to the livery stable.

There he was able to trade the proprietor out of a small bay cow pony, eight years old but sound, for the sum of twenty-five dollars, and for a like sum he purchased a much worn and skirt scarred saddle, an old blanket and a bridle which had a strap for one rein and a tie rope for the other. This gave Saguache Joe a complete road outfit, such as it was, and left him three silver dollars in hard cash.

"Know the layout to the Half Circle H?" he asked the liveryman.

The query appeared to embarrass the liveryman. He displayed a reluctance to gossip about the Half Circle H, as if some phase of the subject cowed him. Finally, however, he gave out a few details.

"It's all shot to pieces," he told the customer. "There was two brothers and one sister. Bert, the steadiest brother, got shot up by Riff of the Soup Dish. Riff was acquitted because Bert Hifeldt had rid up to the Soup Dish and started bawling Riff out about Riff's stealing water from the creek, what belonged by priority to the Half Circle H. You can't convict a man when the victim is armed and jumps the other man at his own house. That left Oscar Hifeldt and Molly Hifeldt. Oscar ain't got the head Bert had, and they say the outfit's shot to pieces. Cattle starvin' and hands quittin' and such like. But understand, pardner, I'm neutral. I wouldn't start no talk against Bill Riff. Riff's a—"

Joe turned away contemptuously, waiting to hear no more. It was no business of Joe's anyway, so he mounted his bay cow pony and left the livery. But as he rode out of town, he reflected that the car of seed cake should turn the Half Circle H's luck. After this hard winter, cattle that survived should bring a neat price in the spring. And here was a car of cake to insure the survival of the herd.

Joe followed the road that turned south from town, a trail which, by the agent's information, was the road to Sandoval. The snow was packed hard in the middle of the road, although on either side it was eight to ten inches deep, with an occasional drift. Joe hadn't ridden three miles before he saw a dead cow.

Yes, mused Saguache Joe, lucky was the ranch that had a car of cake. It was certainly one hard winter on cowstuff.

ANOTHER mile, and Joe saw another bovine carcass. After a while he began to see living cattle, backs humped, heads drooped, standing forlornly here and there in the snow. It seemed to Joe that he could count every rib. Pretty soon he came close enough to a cow to read its brand, Half Circle H. Joe hastened his pace. He was a true cowboy, and hence it hurt him to see these animals starving while on the siding at Parkview was a car of cake designed for their comfort.

Another mile, and he became conscious of something peculiar in his pony's gait. He dismounted and discovered that the horse had cast a shoe. Another shoe was loose, he saw. A cheap job of shoeing on a cheap horse. Joe wished he had his own big boned strawberry roan mare, the one he had lost to the bandit at the water tank. The thing to do, he decided, was to stop at the Half Circle H long enough to borrow some pincers and remove all the shoes from this pony. It was certain that they were not needed in the snow.

Remounting, he rode on. On this slick track, five miles an hour was his best pace. He had left town at about eight, so it was somewhere around ten when he first sighted the Half Circle H buildings.

He called it a neat layout. The fences

looked pretty good. There was a cottonwood creek paralleling the road, and in the valley of this creek Joe could see the ditch bound contour of a hay *vega*. But he saw no stacks. There was nothing on the meadow except a white blanket of snow—barring an occasional lump of red and white, a dead cow.

"Gee!" muttered Joe. "This outfit'll think I'm Santa Claus, when I bring the news about this car o' cake."

He came to a gate on whose post were marked the characters—Half Circle H. Immediately inside the gate was a group of buildings. Joe entered the gate and passed up a lane between two rows of shacks—barn, crib, shed and feed lot to the left; and bunk shack, cook shack, blacksmith shop and chicken house to the right. Heading the street was an adobe ranch residence, a solid structure of one floor. The environs seemed deserted, except for one gaunt yellow mule whose head and neck protruded over the lower half door of the barn.

Saguache Joe went to the main house.

AT FIRST there was no response to his knockings. Finally there appeared a young woman of perhaps twenty-five years. Joe did not miss the fact that she opened the door only a little way until she had carefully appraised him. He grinned his usual amiable grin, whereupon she opened the door wide.

"How do you do?" she greeted.

"Howdy," responded Joe. "This is the Half Circle H, ain't it?"

"What's left of it," assented the young woman, looking past Joe down the deserted lane. It seemed to Joe that her shoulders shrugged and that she bit her lips.

"I just brought a message from the agent at Parkview," Joe said.

By now two things had struck him with something of a shock. In the first place, although the girl was of a plump, almost athletic build and was dressed in the corduroy suiting of a man, he saw by her eyes that he had interrupted a session of very feminine weeping. In the second place he saw that she was extremely pretty; at least she was pretty by Saguache Joe's standards, for Joe belonged to that school of connoisseurs who prefer women to be plump rather than willowy; altogether this young woman was of a type which suited Joe exactly. Joe didn't know it then, but Molly Hifeldt came of good Holland stock. There was a homely Dutch charm about her. Her hair was rich brown. Knotted high on her head, it contradicted the impression, imposed by her clothes, of a rough riding ranch girl.

"I just want to leave word," informed Joe, "that there's a car of cake, prepaid and billed to you, spotted on the siding at Parkview."

"Oh, has it come at last?"

The words carried a mixture of joy and despair. Joe understood her to mean that the cake had come too late to do the cattle any good. He said quickly:

"Yes, ma'am, and you ought to have it hauled out right sudden. Agent said he'd protect you on demurrage, but I seen some of your cowstuff as I come along. Better start throwing that cake in the feed troughs, pound a day to the cow at first, then increase to two pounds. How many cows you got and do they know how to eat cake?"

"About six hundred," was the rather dispirited answer. "And yes, my brothers fed cake last winter. I'll—I'll—we'll get the cake out right away. Thank you very much. What did you say your name was?"

"Folks call me Saguache Joe."

"I'm Molly Hifeldt," said the girl. "Are you staying in this neighborhood?"

"No, I'm headed for Sandoval, New Mex. This road goes to Sandoval, doesn't it?"

"I've heard so. I've never been that far south."

"Thanks. By the way, ma'am, care if I borrow your blacksmith shop a minute? I want to unshoe my bronc before riding on."

"Help yourself," offered Miss Hifeldt.

"I'll—I'll—I guess I'll be tending to that seed cake."

JOE LEFT her and led his pony down to the shack which served as a smithy. The place was spare of tools, and it took Joe some minutes to find a pair of pincers. Ten minutes later he had removed the three remaining shoes from his horse.

He was on the point of mounting to ride away when he observed a sight that definitely arrested him. He saw Molly Hifeldt, now wearing a sheepskin coat over her corduroys, emerge from the barn, leading the gaunt yellow mule. There was a harness on the mule's back. The girl led the mule to the shafts of an old buggy and began securing the traces to a single tree. It had already struck Joe that he had seen no man on the place. What did the girl think she was going to do with that mule and buggy?

"Are you all alone, ma'am?" asked Joe as he left his pony and trudged across the ranch street to the barn.

"Yes, I'm all alone," answered Molly Hifeldt, stooping in the snow to rebuckle one of her overshoes. When she arose again Joe saw that she was biting her lips. He knew now that there was something peculiarly tragic about the situation and he meant to find out about it. He asked for details.

"My brother Oscar," the girl finally informed him, "went north to Alamosa to borrow some money from a bank there. Oscar's been gone a week and I'm worried."

It was plain that the girl was making a brave attempt to fight back a flood of tears. Joe became seized with a great urge to help her.

"But what about the cowhands on this layout?" he inquired.

"One by one, in the last few weeks, they've quit," he was informed. "We had a Mexican and his wife who did the housework, but yesterday they quit, too. Since Bill Riff shot my brother Bert things have all gone wrong. Riff stole all our ditch water last summer and we didn't raise any hay. The cattle are too thin to sell. Which means they're also too thin to be stolen—they couldn't stand a drive out of the country."

Sagauche Joe was amazed.

"And where were you going with this mule and buggy?" he wanted to know.

"To town," replied Molly Hifeldt with an air of utter hopelessness, "to get some of that oil cake."

"But you couldn't haul over two sacks in that buggy eleven miles on this snow," objected Joe. "But maybe you plan to hire some men in town. Tomorrow they can hitch up your farm wagons and get the cake out in quantity."

Joe had already noticed two standard farm wagons parked over by the feed lot, hub deep in a drift.

"No," replied the girl, avoiding Joe's eyes and digging one of the toes of her overshoes into the snow. "We—that is, I—have no money. I couldn't hire any one. And if I did, I have no horses."

"No horses!" echoed Joe. "How do you run a six hundred cow layout without horses?"

"We don't. We had four good hay teams and some saddle stock. Last time I went to town, some one drove every horse off this place. I suspect the Soup Dish outfit, but can prove nothing."

It was easy to see that nothing but the native Dutch restraint of Molly Hifeldt was keeping her from collapse. As for Saguache Joe, his blood was up. Until he had seen the girl through her troubles he knew that he would travel no farther along the road to Sandoval.

He talked to her awhile and probed from her still further information. Finally he suggested:

"What about hiring me? And three pals of mine by the names of Elkins, Slavins and Fox?"

"I couldn't pay you," replied Molly, shrugging her shoulders.

"Sure you could," insisted Joe. "We'll haul the cake and save the cows. Soon as your brother Oscar gets back we'll blow. He'll probably bring back the money he went off to borrow, and can pay us off."

"But Oscar might not—well, he might not come home very soon," the young woman objected. "Oscar isn't like Bert was. I can't depend on Oscar like I could Bert. He—he—"

"Never mind," Joe hasted to say. "Anyway the cake'll pull the cows through this snow, and in the spring they'll bring good money. You can sell a few and pay us off. Me and my pals'll stick till Oscar gets back, win or lose."

JOE WOULD hear of no other solution and under his confident assurance the girl brightened somewhat. She was easily convinced that any program of trying to haul out cake in a one mule buggy was a joke. Such a method would require, Joe estimated, all the rest of the winter and the next summer. The railroad would hardly allow the car to be spotted over a week. And the cattle would starve to death if they weren't put on a stiff cake ration immediately.

"And maybe we can find out who ran off your horse stock," suggested Joe. "I met Riff in town. What kind of an outfit has he got?"

"A no good outfit," informed Molly Hifeldt. "They were always causing trouble to my brothers. Riff's ranch is the Soup Dish and the foreman, Mike Lambert, is as tough as Riff."

For a minute Joe pondered the issue. Finally he said:

"I tell you; inasmuch as you're all hitched up and I want to send a telegram anyway, you might as well go to town. File this wire."

The cowboy fished paper and pencil from his coat and wrote:

Steve Elkins,
Sandoval, New Mexico:

Bring Slavins and Fox and come quick to the Half Circle H, eleven miles south of Parkview Colorado. Get two heavy hay teams and drive them ahead of you. Just before you get here, make a wide detour around the Soup Dish. If you see the Soup Dish outfit, see it first. —SAGUACHE JOE

"And here's three dollars," Joe said to Molly Hifeldt. "Spend one for the telegram and one for a case of pork and beans. Have the depot agent help you load two sacks of oil cake in the buggy. Don't try to haul more through the snow. While you're gone, I'll round up about a hundred head of the thinnest cows I can find, lining 'em up at the troughs in the feed lot. *Tambien*, I'll try to figure out a way to haul out two-three ton of cake tomorrow."

The cowboy's sympathy touched the girl deeply.

"You are awfully good," she said.

Joe bustled her into the buggy, tucking a blanket around her. Then he thought of something else.

"By the way," he mentioned, "I heard Riff say he was riding home this afternoon. He uses this same road, doesn't he? In that case you'll meet him on the way. Any danger of him molesting you?"

"None whatever," assured Molly Hifeldt. "I have a gun in my pocket. If Bill Riff tried to stop me on the road, I'd shoot him."

"That's the talk," agreed Joe heartily. "And now, get going."

The girl gathered the reins in her gloved hands and smiled down upon Joe from the buggy seat.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Saguache Joe," she said, her voice breaking. "Your coming just now is a miracle. I— I—"

"Let it go at that," interrupted the cowboy. "I haven't done a thing yet. I talk about gettin' two-three tons of that cake out here right away. But I don't know how. I'm bluffing. I'm singing to keep cheerful. My pals can't get here for three-four days. I'm broke, same as you are. With no money, no horses and no men, how we gonna get that car o' cake eleven miles across the snow? Yet them cows'll die fifty a day if they ain't fed. That cake's just got to move to the Half Circle H. It's just got to."

SAGUACHE JOE repeated that last desperate resolve to himself over and over again as she drove away. He stood there in the snow by the barn. Watching the buggy drawn by the mule recede down

the road at an awkward and reluctant pace.

Then he set to work. It did not take Joe long to corral a hundred head of thin cows. In fact many of the older animals, those in greatest distress, were grouped just west of the feed lot, heads forlornly turned toward the empty troughs therein. The cowboy easily understood this. As the grass was covered with snow and ice, and as the cows had been cake fed in that same feed lot the preceding winter, the hungry animals now naturally looked toward the same relief.

It was not hard for Joe to understand why the thieves who had stolen the Half Circle H horses had not also raided the cattle. On snow, horses winter better than cattle. They are more competent at pawing up feed. Also, horses are not sold by weight. Thus the horses may have been in shape for a drive out of the country, whereas the cattle certainly were not. And, Joe realized, even if the emaciated cattle had withstood the ordeal of a fast and forced rustlers' drive, they would have been unsalable in any market.

Nevertheless, they represented a real value. Joe saw that about fifty per cent. of the cows were "springers", that is, they were heavy with calf. Oil cake could save not only the cows. At the same time Joe figured that it would take twelve hundred pounds of cake a day to salvage the herd, whereas the yellow mule could not transport more than two sacks a day.

By three o'clock Joe had herded a hundred head of the thinnest cows into the lot. He planned to feed them two pounds of cake each, that night, from the slim cargo brought out by Molly Hifeldt. Fortunately there was a tank in the lot, into which water was piped from a small spring.

This work done, Joe stalled his bay cow pony in the barn. In the loft he found no decent hay, although the loft floor was covered about six inches deep with old chaff and stalks.

"If this don't give that bronc the heaves, nothin' will," Joe muttered, as he sorted out the cleanest pickings he could find for his pony.

The stuff was so fine that he had to handle it with a scoop instead of a fork.

Next he sat down to figure out a program.

"First time I ever knew that eleven miles was such a daggone long ways," he mused. "There's them twenty-five ton of cake, bought and paid for, and here's them six hundred head of cows, starvin' to death. Wrap them cows around that cake, and spring'll find this ranch with six hundred live cows and three hundred sucking calves. But it's got to be done quick, and no foolin'."

So much was plain. Joe, in his roundup of the hundred thin cows, had found a number of animals too weak to rise. He had also encountered five cases of abortion—tragedies due to pure poverty of flesh.

His mind fixed on Riff; he felt a craving for a showdown with Riff. Riff it was who had taken the Hifeldt's irrigation water last summer, thus leaving the Half Circle H without winter hay. It was Riff who had shot Bert Hifeldt, when Bert had ridden up to protest about the ditch water. Riff was responsible, so by Sagauche Joe's logic it was Riff who should pay the score.

Riff would be riding home pretty soon, on the way from town to the Soup Dish. Which reminded Joe that Riff, on arriving home, might possibly start trouble. Riff wasn't likely to forget his run in with Joe at Parkview. Learning that Joe was working on the Hifeldt ranch, Riff and his tough foreman, Mike Lambert, might conceivably start a war before Joe was ready for it.

HE DID not want a war until his three pals arrived from Sandoval. Single handed, he could hardly conduct a war with the Soup Dish and at the same time transport a car load of cake from town to the Half Circle H.

Suddenly a bold thought pierced the cowboy's mind. It was born of the fact

that no one on the Soup Dish knew him. Riff knew him, but Riff wasn't home yet. Very well, he wouldn't let Riff get home. He could kidnap Riff and— Ah! That was it. A flash of inspiration revealed to Joe a scheme which might save the entire situation.

Twenty minutes later he was squatting, afoot, ambushed behind a blind of snow and tumble weeds, just without the Half Circle H gate and at the side of the main road. It was the same road that Joe had traveled that morning and on which he had planned to keep on traveling—the road to Sandoval. Now he observed a man mounted on a big iron gray horse approach from the direction of Parkview. Joe recognized Riff.

When the rider was opposite the blind, Joe stepped out and leveled his gun—the same second hand gun he had bought for ten dollars at the hardware store—at the man's head. A step more and he had caught Riff's bridle rein with his left hand.

"You're helt up, Mr. Riff," greeted Saguache Joe. "Remember me? I'm the gent had breakfast with you this mornin'. But right now you're helt up. If you don't want to hear this gun go off, stick your fingers in your ears."

Riff, amazed, uttered a crisp oath. However, he elevated his hands ear high. Joe seized Riff's gun. Then he jerked Riff unceremoniously from saddle to snow.

"Blast your hide!" yelped Riff.

His rage fairly choked him and denied him further speech.

Saguache Joe booted the man to his feet. Then, leading the iron gray horse, he prodded the prisoner in front of him through the gate, up the ranch street to the main house.

Finally Riff found his tongue and broke into a tirade of abuse.

"Blast your hide!" he bawled. "First time I get holt of a gun, I'll—"

"But you aren't like to get holt of a gun today, or even tomorrow," suggested Saguache Joe. "All you'll get holt of is a pencil to write a letter to Mike Lambert with. I'll take the letter to Mike myself."

"You gonna take a letter to Lambert?" yelped Riff. "Why, blast you, Mike'd ride you off the Soup Dish on a .45 slug."

"Oh, I don't think so," disagreed Joe pleasantly.

He was forced to give Riff a volley of sharp kicks to get him to the house. This house was, of course, deserted, as Molly Hifeldt had gone to town. Once inside, Joe prodded Riff to an unused room, a room which, by its accouterments, seemed to have been occupied formerly by one of the Hifeldt brothers. In this room Joe neatly tripped Riff so that he sprawled on the floor.

Joe found a short tie rope hanging from a hook on the wall, and with this he firmly secured Riff's ankles so that he could not walk. Then he helped the man to a chair at a table. He next produced a sheet of blank paper, an envelope and a pencil. These he placed in front of Riff.

"Write Mike Lambert a letter," Joe commanded. "I'll say what to write."

"I will like hell!" snarled Riff.

"You'll be there," countered Joe grimly, "if you don't."

He cocked the hammer of his gun, pointing the weapon steadily at Riff's chest. Then with his left hand he laid his watch on the table.

"I'll give you till the second hand gets around to sixty," announced Joe. "If you haven't picked up that pencil by then, I start shooting."

"You're bluffing," said Riff, trying to sneer; but there was a stream of sweat trickling from his forehead down into the black stubble of his beard.

"Call it, then," suggested Joe.

Swiftly with his tumb he uncocked and recocked the gun's hammer. The threat was too much for Riff, who snatched the pencil in a frenzy of fear just as the second hand of the watch reached fifty-five.

"Write," Joe ordered.

In the end, Riff wrote. Joe instructed him, phrase by phrase, the text of his letter. The finished missive read:

Lambert:
I have to go up the line three or four days on a steer deal. But I saw the Hifeldt woman in town and made a sweet contract with her. She was broke, and had a car of oil cake on the siding. Had no money and no credit to hire it hauled out. I agreed to haul it to her crib, and feed it to her cows, for one third the cows I could save. The bearer, Luke Ganzel, will do the feeding; you and the rest of the outfit do the hauling. Hitch up our two best teams and get that cake moving. You get the point, don't you, Mike? You savvy why them cows wasn't driv off when the broncs was. Well, by the time we get a third of the cows for our work, the other two thirds will be strong enough to stand a long drive. Get busy.
—BILL RIFF

ALL DURING the writing of this letter Joe kept Riff in constant fear of sudden death. Finally the thing was done. Riff was even forced to address and seal the envelope. Then Joe immediately rendered his prisoner entirely helpless.

He tripped Riff, rolled him to his stomach. Then he secured Riff's hands behind him and trussed these bound hands to his bound ankles. This done, Saguache Joe left the room, locked it behind him and went out to the barn.

Standing outside in the snow was Riff's iron gray gelding. What to do with it was Joe's next problem. Discretion dictated that he shoot the beast and hide the carcass in a drift. Yet Joe could not bear to do that. Neither dared he turn the animal loose, for fear it would go home and give the show away.

Finally he put the gray in a lean-to annex at the rear of the barn. In this lean-to there was a box stall. Here Joe left the gray, electing to consult with Molly Hifeldt when she came home as to its disposal.

Then he mounted his own bay pony and started up the main road toward the Soup Dish. He recalled his information that the Soup Dish was only four miles farther south.

He wondered whether Mike Lambert would recognize this bay cow pony as a local livery horse. Likely not, he considered, for the bay was inconspicuous, with no outstanding points. As a horse, it was in no way to be compared with Joe's own big boned roan mare, Strawberry, the mount he had lost last night to the holdup man at the water tank.

As he rode along he framed a story to tell Lambert.

Soon he arrived at the Soup Dish, observing that it was a prosperous layout, its meadows dotted with stacks and its cattle in fair midwinter condition. He saw a man lounging in front of the bunk shack, a two gunned fellow with a long, horsey face and a bulldog jaw. Joe rode up confidently and accosted him.

"YES, I'M Mike Lambert," the man admitted, in answer to Joe's question.

Joe smirked, looked over his shoulder, then shot a surreptitious glance into the bunk shack. After which he spoke crookedly through the corner of his mouth.

"All right, Lambert; call me Luke Ganzel. I got two-three other names, but that'n'll do. Riff's got me planted on the Half Circle H. You're not supposed to know me. Savvy?"

Lambert gaped suspiciously.

"What's all this song and dance? I don't make you, fellah."

But Lambert advanced a step or two and took a letter which the alleged Ganzel was holding out.

"Bill's got some lay framed—I don't know just what it is," explained Joe. "The Hifeldt woman don't know me and Bill is old pals; she thinks he just picked me up in town today. She made some deal with Riff, but she wouldn't stand for a regular Soup Dish man holdin' down her bunk shack. So I work that end. All you do is haul the cake."

"I don't make you," repeated Lambert, gaping.

"Well, dammit, read the letter and get wise," snapped Joe; he sat there in his saddle and rolled a cigaret, as if he were entirely unconcerned whether Lambert "made" him or not.

Looking up, he saw that the Soup Dish

foreman was reading the letter. Without waiting for him to finish it, Joe said:

"Well, I'll be going, Lambert. It's just as well you and me ain't seen together. Bill said when you and your teams showed up tomorrow to act like I was a teetotal stranger."

With that, Joe wheeled his horse and trotted off through the snow. It took all his nerve to ride away from Lambert, for he half expected to get a bullet in his back. That random phrase he had dictated about "you know why them cows wasn't driv off along with the broncs" might or might not be disastrous. If the Soup Dish were guilty, well enough. But if they were innocent of driving off the horses, then the clause would stamp Riff's letter as a fake.

Yet Joe turned his back on Lambert and rode off while Mike was reading that very clause. Fifty yards away Joe turned and looked back. He saw that Mike's eyes were on the letter and that a crooked grin was ripening on his long, horsey face. Joe spurred his bay and trotted on exultingly. His bluff had won.

Lambert was taking the bait, which was equivalent to a confession that he had helped Riff drive off the Half Circle H horse stock.

JOE'S ARRIVAL at the Hifeldt ranch was coincident with that of Molly Hifeldt. It was just dusk. In her buggy the ranch girl had a cargo consisting of two sacks of oil cake and one case of pork and beans.

As Joe lifted the latter out into the snow, Molly smiled apologetically.

"Yes," she admitted, "I spent your three dollars. But when Oscar comes home we'll pay you back. The truth is that the house larder is almost as low as the feed crib."

"Did you send the telegram?"

"Yes."

"Fine," exulted Saguache Joe. "That means reinforcements in three-four days. And them pals of mine are a right handy set of saddle squeezers—and trigger squeezers, too. No, don't go up to the house yet, Miss Hifeldt. Something I got to tell you first."

Quite mystified, Molly Hifeldt waited while Joe unloaded the two sacks of cake. She watched him carry them one by one to the feed lot, saw him dump their contents into the long feed troughs, saw a hundred lean cows close in on the troughs like a pack of jackals around the carcass of a lamb.

"There's them many cows, anyway," Joe called to her, "which won't keel over in the next forty-eight hours. But that's only a sample. Tomorrow we haul out three-four tons and give the whole herd a treat."

"What?" cried Molly Hifeldt, "How?"

Joe picked up the case of pork and beans and started toward the house. The woman followed. Inside the house, he escorted her to that room which served as the cell of Bill Riff.

Riff met their intrusion with a profane volley of threats. For this Saguache Joe rewarded him with a kick on the shins.

"One more crack like that and I gag you, Riff," announced Joe. "You're lucky to be alive; so shut up."

Then he explained to the amazed Miss Hifeldt the wherefore of Riff's confinement. With the girl, fear followed swiftly on the heels of surprise.

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that," she cried. "You can't keep him here forever; and when he gets free, he and Mike Lambert will kill you."

"When my friends from Sandoval get here," countered Joe, "this Soup Dish outfit will be as tame as a bunch of yearling ewes. In the meantime, just to keep 'em out of devilment, we'll let 'em haul out our cake. Now leave this fellow to me, ma'am. I'll hand feed him in here and sleep in the same room with him. He'll be as safe as a double cinched saddle on a hobbled horse."

"Speaking of horses, where did you put his?" asked the ranch girl, quite practically.

"That's a point, all right," admitted

Joe. "By rights, I'd oughter have took Riff's gray to a deep snowdrift and shot it. But I never could bear to shoot no sound horse. So I put this'n in that box stall in the back of the barn."

"What if those Soup Dish men see the gray when they're unloading cake tomorrow?" worried Molly.

"They'll unload at the crib," reminded the cowboy, "havin' no call to go to the barn. But if you say so I'll go shoot and bury the horse."

"I can't bear to let you do that," objected the girl. "There's a padlock over there on Oscar's bureau. Lock the box stall up with that padlock and put the key in your pocket."

"I'll do that right now," promised Joe.

"While I get supper," amended Molly Hifeldt, and retreated to the kitchen.

Joe took the padlock which lay amid an array of masculine effects on Oscar's bureau, and went to the barn. Before locking up Riff's horse he decided to feed it. For this purpose he used two scoopfuls of the dusty chaff from the loft.

"Eat it and heave, daggone you," muttered Joe as he put out the chaff. "But maybe you won't heave. Some do and some don't. I see that yellow mule ain't heavin'; and he must have been livin' on this trash since the hay give out."

The heaves, be it understood, is an equine ailment produced by dusty feed. It becomes a chronic cough, almost incurable. One may cure an affected horse by changing it to dustless feed, but thereafter throughout all the animal's life it will need hardly more than a smell of dust to start it heaving violently.

Feeding done, Joe snapped the padlock on the door of the box stall and put the key in his pocket. He then went out into the dusty feed lot and watched the thin cows feast on oil cake. The two hundred pounds of cake were nearly gone and the animals were licking the boards of the troughs. Joe observed that many other cows had trailed in from the range of their own volition, and were bellowing jealously over the rear fence of the lot.

Cows, once fed on cake, become feed wise. Far out on the range other Half Circle H cows had seen a procession of their kind moving toward the corrals and had understood the reason why. Along they came too, mooing in distress. Cattle a mile away saw the homeward movement of cattle a half mile away. And thus had ensued an automatic and horseless roundup. Joe knew that by morning practically the entire herd would be banked against the lot fence.

"It'll sure save a lot of ridin'," Joe assured himself, "and simplify the whole job."

HE WENT to the house and found that Molly Hifeldt had shed her man's clothing and donned the skirts of her sex. Moreover, she had supper ready. Joe closed the door of Oscar's room against the baleful groanings of Bill Riff, then seated himself at a table opposite the comely hostess of his adventure. She proved to be an estimable cook.

That night, to better guard against Riff's escape, Joe slept in the same room with him. During the night he had to get up several times and quiet Riff. Riff at times waxed violent. He writhed mightily in his bonds. Terrible was the vengeance which he swore to inflict on Saguache Joe and the Half Circle H.

Early in the morning Joe fed Riff the contents of a can of pork and beans with a spoon. Riff, in his impotent rage, almost bit through the metal of the spoon. After that, the prisoner was gagged and the door of his room locked. The shades of his window were pulled down.

And for good reason. About eight o'clock, two four horse teams were seen coming up the main road from the south. There was an extra man on each wagon seat. Thus the caravan included eight draft horses, two farm wagons and four men. On one of the seats Joe recognized Mike Lambert. Clearly here was the Soup Dish outfit obeying the written instruction of their chief.

To confirm this instruction, Mike

Lambert stopped at the gate and came up to see Molly Hifeldt. The girl went out to meet him. Having been coached by Joe, she responded unblinkingly—

"Yes, we have made arrangements with Mr. Riff for the Soup Dish to haul our cake."

Which was the pure truth; although of course Lambert could not guess the nature of the arrangements. Saguache Joe took occasion to stand behind Molly while she addressed Lambert. Over her shoulder he winked wickedly at Mike. Mike caught the wink, and his own lips expanded in a crooked grin.

Soon the hauling caravan had moved on toward Parkview.

"We got 'em goin'," chuckled Saguache Joe. "It's like takin' candy from babies, only easier."

"But oh!" worried Molly. "I'm so afraid they'll find Riff, or his gray horse in that box stall."

"In unloading that cake at the crib," Joe assured her, "they'll have no call to go near either the house or the barn. Besides, I'll be watching."

"But you're only one man, and they're four."

"We'll be four, too," Joe reminded, "when my *compañeros* get here from Sandoval. And when your brother Oscar comes home he'll make five. That ought to handle 'em."

AFFAIRS moved smoothly that day. Saguache Joe and Molly Hifeldt became fast friends. The more Joe saw of the young woman, the more he liked her. He began scheming to get a steady job on the Half Circle H.

Riff gave no potent trouble. He was regagged in the afternoon, when the two Soup Dish wagons hove in sight coming from the direction of Parkview. The wagons drew up, each loaded with thirty sacks of cake. But for the snow they could have hauled fifty sacks each; yet as it was three tons in all were delivered and stored in the crib.

Joe had good opportunity to size up Lambert's three companions. One was a heavy set, red bearded cowhand whom the others called Stumpy. Another was a lengthy beanpole in corduroys who was generally addressed as Tucker. The fourth answered to the name of Pete.

While they unloaded at the crib, Joe had a good excuse to keep out of their way. He lugged eight cake sacks to the feed lot and filled the troughs. He was afraid to let many of the hungry cattle in, for fear they would trample the weaklings. They were bawling jealously outside the lot. So he found a place nearby on the range where the winds had swept the ground bare of snow. On this bare ground he spread the contents of eight more sacks. The cattle closed in on the feed and the Half Circle H herd was saved.

Just before the Soup Dish teams left Lambert sought out Joe.

"Ganzel," he asked, "did Riff go away on the train, or horseback?"

"Why," replied Joe without thinking, "I reckon he went up the line by train, Lambert."

"That's funny," growled the Soup Dish foreman. "His gray bronc ain't in the livery. If he went by train, where did he leave his bronc?"

"How do I know?" snapped Joe, assuming a peevishness, to cover the confusion he felt because of his stupid break. To change the subject he asked quickly, "Gonna haul out a couple o' more loads tomorrow, Lambert?"

"Reckon so," answered Lambert moodily.

Joe became somewhat nervous as Lambert walked over to his three helpers and engaged them in close converse. Finally the heavy set man, Stumpy, left the group and strolled over to Joe. His eyes seemed to be fixed on Joe's gun, which fact more than ever worried Joe.

"Ganzel," said Stumpy, "where did you get that gun?"

Joe knew that his best cue was to be as hard boiled as any one else. He jerked the gun out and pointed it at the questioner.

"What the hell business is that of yourn?" he yelped.

To his immense relief Stumpy merely laughed.

"Aw, don't get sore," said Stumpy. "I just noticed the bone was split off one side of the butt. Kinda looks like a gun I bought last month on time, at the Parkview hardware store and then turned back in after makin' one payment."

"Well, what of it?" asked Joe. "Maybe it is. I bought a second hand gun there yesterday myself."

"Well, if it's the same gun, it's no good," informed Stumpy. "The firin' pin's broke and it won't go off. I just thought I'd tell you, bein' as you're one of us."

Joe turned the muzzle of the gun upward toward the sky and pulled the trigger. There was only a click.

"Well, nail my hide to a snubbin' post!" exclaimed Joe, grinning sheepishly at Stumpy. "That's one on me. Totin' a no good gun! And I might have had to use it any time, too."

Stumpy, laughing raucously, rejoined his friends. Naturally he was quite unaware of the double meaning in Joe's last remark. The Lambert crowd drove off to the Soup Dish for the night. Joe immediately discarded the worthless gun and secured the weapon he had taken from Riff. In case the enemy might later recognize some mark on its butt, he belted it under his sheepskin coat.

THE NEXT day went as smoothly as the first. Sixty more sacks of cake were delivered by the Soup Dish. While the wagons were in town, Joe made various rides around the Half Circle H range, with a sack of cake on his saddle. Every time he found a cow down, too weak to be driven, he deposited five pounds of cake by the weakling's head and rode on. By night he had thus salvaged many otherwise doomed cows.

When the wagons were unloaded that second evening, Lambert and his men drove home without parley. Saguache Joe occupied himself between then and supper by performing the barn chores.

The pickings of chaff from the loft floor were getting slim. There were three equines to be fed—one yellow mule, one bay cow pony, and the gray gelding of Bill Riff which was in the padlocked box stall. The cotton seed cake was, of course, unsuitable for horse feed. So Joe was forced to ladle out the dusty chaff. At each feeding he expected to hear one or more of the three equines heaving, coughing, sneezing, but in some manner they seemed to manage the feed.

"Well, some do and some don't," mused Joe, as he went to his own supper.

Sitting opposite Molly Hifeldt at mealtimes was becoming more and more of a thrillful experience to the cowboy. At the outset he had offered to rustle for himself at the cook shack, but the girl refused to be left alone, for long, in the house with Riff. There was always a chance that Riff might burst his bonds and escape.

Just after dark it began to snow again. Molly and Joe sat up till ten o'clock, discussing this unfavorable omen. Joe insisted that the cattle were safe, even if they should get another foot of snow. What worried him most was horse fodder.

"True, we've got three horses," he admitted, "but we sure need a couple o' sacks of oats and five-six bales of bright hay."

"We must find some way to get them," agreed Molly.

Saguache Joe felt a delicious warmth at her use of the pronoun "we". It was an experience he wanted to make permanent. Mighty nice, he thought, to be sitting here snugly in this ranch-house, and to hear Molly say "we must do this" and "we must do that". To the cowboy, Saguache Joe, it was all exquisitely chummy. And so they sat there till ten o'clock, while the snow flew without, while from the feed lot came the hummings of a contented herd, while from beyond all the night came the choppy whine of coyotes.

THE VERY next morning luck turned viciously against Joe and the Half Circle H. Joe went out at daylight to investigate the fall of snow. He found a clear sky and only about two inches of new snow on top of about eight inches of old.

"Not so bad!" he mused, relieved.

But then a sight met his eyes which gave him a start. He saw man tracks, a double line of them, in this new snow. How could that be, he wondered. He knew Molly hadn't been out. Riff had not escaped. Who could have made that double line of footprints, which led from the barn to the house and back again?

Joe unbuttoned his sheepskin coat so that his hand might be convenient to his gun, the gun that had belonged to Riff. Warily he followed those mysterious tracks from house to barn.

Once in the barn, Joe passed on down the aisle between stalls toward the door giving into the rear lean-to, the lean-to which enclosed the box stall sheltering the gray gelding of Bill Riff. The mule and the bay pony, he could see, were all right. But before he reached the door of the lean-to he heard a horse coughing raucously from beyond it. The nature of the cough was plain. It was what Joe had expected from the first. Too much dusty feed had obviously infected Riff's gray with the ailment known as heaves.

Joe conceded that there was an especial reason for it, too. Of the three equines, the box stalled gray was the most likely to get the heaves. The closer confined the horse, the less fresh air it breathes, the more susceptible it becomes to the heaves.

But when Saguache Joe opened the door leading into the lean-to he ran into a surprise. There, jerking at the padlock on the door of the box stall, stood Mike Lambert of the Soup Dish. Joe stiffened, hand to the butt of his gun. So Lambert had made those tracks to the house! Had he peered in a window and espied the prone and bound form of Riff?

Lambert whirled at Joe's intrusion. Joe faced him, hand on gun. Lambert did not draw. Joe, not wishing to force a showdown, inquired—

"What you doin', Lambert?"

By now he could see through the open rear door of the lean-to that Lambert's riding horse was standing behind the barn in a position to be screened from the house.

"Just heard a horse heavin' in here," was Lambert's excuse. "I thought he might need a leetle fresh air. What you got him locked up for?"

"That's a sick hoss," explained Joe. "Don't want him infecting the other stock."

"Heaves ain't contagious."

"Look here, Lambert," snapped Joe. "Riff left me in charge at this end and he left you to do the hauling. I'll tend to my end and you tend to yours. Ain't you goin' to haul no cake today?"

"No," grumbled Lambert, all the while eying the gun butt on which Joe's hand rested. "That's what I rid down to tell you. Snow's too deep for hauling."

"All right," replied Joe. "But why didn't you knock on the door and tell me that, when you came up to the house awhile ago?"

"I ain't been to the house," denied Lambert.

"The hell you didn't. Your tracks are there to prove it."

"Whose tracks?" yelped Lambert. "And say, who you think you are, anyway? And—"

WITH a movement too swift for the eye to follow, Lambert shot from his thigh; he did not draw, but through the end of his holster he sent a .45 bullet at Saguache Joe.

Yet so quick was the shot that the aim might have been improved. The slug, aimed at Joe's chest, tore through the biceps muscle of his right arm, jerking his hand from his own gun butt. Joe did not fall; he stood there, braced for Lambert's second shot. Lambert advanced and punched his gun into Joe's stomach, then resumed his interrupted question.

"And what you doin' with Bill Riff's gun? I'd know it if I seen it in the Maine woods. Bill packed it for five years."

Joe attempted no retort. He stood there, speechless, abusing his own carelessness, expecting each instant to be run through with a bullet. Mike Lambert disarmed him in a trice.

Then from the porch of the ranch-house, some thirty yards in front of the barn, came the cry of Molly Hifeldt:

"Joe—Joe, what's the matter? Was that you shooting?"

"So your name's Joe," sneered Lambert, "'stead of Luke Ganzel. And you was totin' Riff's gun. It's plain as day you got Riff's gray hoss locked up in this stall."

Bitterly Joe abused himself for not having shot and buried the infernal gray horse. And then his mind struck another snag of worry. Not expecting any one from the Soup Dish to pass so early that morning, he had not yet taken his usual precaution of gagging Riff. If Molly Hifeldt had heard the shot from the house, why not Riff? A shot would signify to Riff a conflict with his own crowd, and loosen his profane tongue.

At the very same moment a mighty bull-like roar was indeed heard from the ranch-house. Adobe walls could not cage its piercing, rage fed volume. It struck upon the ears of Mike Lambert, and upon those of Saguache Joe. It was, of course, the vociferous bellow of Bill Riff.

"Yeow! Lambert! Stumpy! Tucker! Pete! Come git me out o' here."

Joe knew that the game was up. Lambert, jamming his gun fiercely against Joe's ribs, summed up the situation completely.

"I see! Riff's bronc locked in this box stall! Riff's gun in your belt! And Riff himself hogtied in the house! I oughter put one through you, feller, but I'll save that chore for Riff. Turn around now and promenade to the house."

When he was halfway to the porch, Joe heard the sounds of wagon wheels crunching along the main road from the south. He turned his head and saw, approaching from the direction of the Soup Dish, two wagons, each manned by two men.

"I was kidding you," jeered Lambert. "I just wanted a excuse to come ahead and spy around. The Soup Dish is all present and accounted for, feller, and you got a running start toward bad luck."

MOLLY HIFELDT stood on the porch, petrified with dread at the menace of Lambert. Lambert drew a second gun and covered her. Then he marched both Joe and the girl into the house, to the room occupied by Riff. Once there, Joe verified the fact that the window shade was pulled down. Thus Lambert, who apparently had made a trip of espionage from barn to house earlier, could not have peered in and seen Riff.

Riff lay prone in his bonds, roaring like a buffalo bull. A few strokes from Lambert's knife and he was freed. He came to his feet and leaped murderously on Saguache Joe. Knowing he was scheduled for annihilation anyway, Joe shot his left fist into Riff's black jowl and sent him reeling backward.

The advantage was of no strategic account, as the only two guns in the room were held by Lambert. Lambert brought one of them down with a crack on Joe's skull, stretching him prone to the floor. Then Mike handed the other gun to Riff.

Molly Hifeldt screamed.

Riff, righting himself, took the gun and stood over Joe like a blood starved fiend. His face, unshaven now for four days, swollen with rage, was an image of black, ripe vengeance unleashed. He pointed his gun downward at Joe's heart and squeezed the trigger. Again Molly Hifeldt screamed; her hands were clutching at her pale throat, and she fainted. She toppled against Riff, then slithered to the floor. The contact dislodged the stance of Riff at the instant of trigger squeeze. The bullet smashed through the floor, missing Joe by a foot.

Smoke drifted upward from Riff's gun.

Riff did not shoot again. The faint of the girl seemed to take a small portion of starch from his temper; the white hot peak of his fury passed and made space for an modicum of reason. He looked down at the two at his feet, at the fainted girl, and at Saguache Joe from whose right sleeve a trickle of blood dripped.

"Better take him outside, Riff," suggested Lambert. "This ain't no place for a bump off. We got to figure how this is goin' to look afterwards. Our boys are outside now."

The advice was sound. Joe, prone on the floor, watched the hot eyes of Riff and saw that the man had started to think; and Joe knew that a thinking man seldom kills in cold blood. Perhaps Riff was recalling the Bert Hifeldt case. From that killing Riff had been acquitted because Bert had invaded the Riff house. But now Riff was in the Hifeldt house. In court the thing might weigh against Riff.

Obviously Lambert was thinking of this too, for he said:

"Listen, Riff; suppose you ventilate this jasper! What do we get out of it? Nothing but another long killing trial and a fee to pay some lawyer. Why not simply have this guy pinched for holding you up on the road and stealing your horse? It's easy proved he stole your horse, because the gray's locked in a box stall. Bet the key's in this feller's pockets right now."

Lambert stooped and frisked Joe's pocket. At his first touch he found a slim padlock key. He restored it to the pocket.

"That's the deadwood," went on Lambert. "Then we can sue the Half Circle H for confining you and forcing you to write that letter; we'll get judgment for their whole layout, land, cows and car o' cake."

If there had been meat in Lambert's first advice, this latter amplification had all the trimmings of a banquet. All the known crimes so far had been committed by the Half Circle H. Why shouldn't the Soup Dish cash in on them?

"We'll talk it over with the boys," grumbled Riff, sheathing his gun.

THEY prodded Saguache Joe to his feet and hustled him from the house. Outside, the Soup Dish wagons were drawn up. The four men in charge of them had heard the last shot and were scurrying toward the house. Midway between house and barn Joe was imprisoned between a circle of six Soup Dish men, who held heated conclave over his fate.

Three of them—Stumpy, Tucker and Pete—agreed with Lambert's advice. They had a perfect court case against Joe and the Half Circle H; so why not let it ride at that? The fourth man of this morning's wagon crew, however, disagreed. He counseled Joe's immediate execution.

"Dead men tell no tales," he said.

"Shut up, Goofy," rebuked Lambert. "This guy ain't got no tale to tell. He don't know a thing."

Joe sized up Goofy. He had never seen him before. He was a little rat faced two gunner with badly pink eyes.

Riff addressed him, asking—

"When did you get back, Goofy?"

"Last night," replied Goofy, "and everything went slick as a whistle. Got rid of them goods down around Sandov—"

"Shut your trap, Goofy," snarled Lambert, scowling at the rat faced man and sending a furtive glance toward Saguache Joe. "That's neither here no there, no way. Point is, what do we do with this jasper who claimed he was Luke Ganzel and who turns out to be Joe somebody?"

"But look!" exclaimed Stumpy, pointing toward the Half Circle H road gate. "Who's that turning in from the main road?"

Every one looked, and saw that a lone rider was entering the gate. He was a fat man with long walrus whiskers and was mounted on a pinto horse. There was an instant of suspense until he was recognized, and then Riff announced sourly:

"I guess that settles it. We'll play this turn like Mike called it. Here comes Baldy Jarrett—star, guns and all."

"The sheriff, b-gosh!" exclaimed Goofy, immediately uneasy. He unbuckled both of his holster flaps.

"Behave yourself, Goofy," cautioned Lambert. "It couldn't be better. Me, I'm daggone glad Baldy showed up, because now we can show him the evidence and romp hard on the Half Circle H."

SHERIFF BALDY JARRETT rode up. He sat there for a moment, eying the group sharply, while his gloved hands stroked icicles from the ends of his mustaches.

His first question came as a complete surprise.

"Is Oscar Hifeldt around here?" he asked, with a queer inflection in his voice.

None of his hearers had expected mention of Oscar Hifeldt.

"No. Why?" responded Mike Lambert.

"I want to ask him where he was the afternoon of the eighth," said Jarrett.

At the same time it was plain that the sheriff sensed some unnatural situation in the group before him; his eyes moved from man to man questioningly, and his mind seemed to be straying from his own words.

"We ain't seen Oscar Hifeldt," said Lambert warily, not knowing what might be up. "We been haulin' cake out here the last two-three days and Oscar ain't showed himself. Why?"

"A masked man held up the Alamosa bank on the eighth," informed Jarrett. "The sheriff of that county just sent me the description, and it kind of fits Oscar Hifeldt. Moreover, Oscar had been in the bank that morning, asking for a loan. He got turned down and was purty sore about it."

"Anybody get shot at the holdup?" asked the Soup Dish man called Pete.

"No, and the fellah was run off before he got any spondulix; so they was no big devilment done. Howsomever, I thought I'd just have a heart to heart talk with Oscar about it to see if he's got a alibi."

"If he's been around here we ain't seen him," insisted Lambert. "But say, Jarrett, lay off that job and horn in on another. We wants this jasper—" Mike pointed at Saguache Joe—"pinched."

"What for?"

Bill Riff came to the front, and in a raucous bellow he delivered the full score of the Soup Dish's grievances. He wound up with—

"Pinch this fellah, Sheriff, and pinch him hard."

Jarrett was naturally much interested. He eyed Joe shrewdly, all the while stroking icicles from his mustaches.

"Well, what's your side of this song and dance, young man?" he asked.

Joe felt that his best bet was to keep silent and wait until he had legal advice. The trouble was that Riff had told the absolute truth. The truth is always hard to combat, so Joe made no attempt to do so.

On the other hand Mike Lambert became voluble.

"It's open and shut, Baldy," he told the sheriff. "Evidence? Why, they'd oodles of it."

"Name a specific charge and show me a specific point of evidence," suggested the sheriff.

"Easy as pie," said Lambert gloatingly. "In the first place, he's a hoss thief caught with the goods locked up and the key in his pocket. He—"

"Talk louder, Lambert," suggested Jarrett. "Them dang cows out there in the feed lot are making so much racket I can't hardly hear you."

Thus Mike Lambert had to raise his voice.

"This gent's got a padlock key in his pants pocket," he told Jarrett. "You'll find the key fits the lock of a box stall at the back of the barn. Everybody knows Riff's big iron gray gelding, of course. Well, that gray is locked in the box stall. It got heaves last night and that's how I come to hear it."

"If that's the case," responded Jarrett as he dismounted, "I reckon I can make a pinch. Hossthief caught with the goods is the same as a warrant."

He came to Joe and searched his pocket. In a moment he produced a small, slim key. Then the eight men of the party, Lambert holding Joe fast by his

unwounded arm, proceeded to the barn. When they came opposite a box stall in the rear lean-to, they could hear the coughing of a heave stricken horse within.

The others stood back, allowing Jarrett to try the key in the padlock. It was an exact fit. Jarrett threw the door open. The stall was gloomy, almost dark. Joe and his captors waited in the aisle while the sheriff entered the box to bring out the horse.

ALL THE while the six hundred cows on the premises were bawling louder and louder for their daily ration of cake.

"Hey, Sheriff! Quit foolin' with that horse and go up to the house and see about Miss Hifeldt," Joe called.

But just then Sheriff Baldy Jarrett emerged from the box stall. He was leading, to the consternation of all eyes, not an iron gray gelding but a strawberry roan mare. A strawberry roan! The Soup Dish men gaped. Yet no one was more surprised than Saguache Joe. Amazement chopped his speech in two as he gazed upon the familiar lines of his own horse. His own! The same horse of which he had been robbed at the water tank four days ago, many miles up the railroad. How had the mare come in this stall?

It was like a conjuror's trick.

"You're barkin' up the wrong tree, Riff," announced Jarrett, scowling suspiciously at the Soup Dish owner. "Your evidence ain't worth a pinch of salt. Gray hoss me eye! This here's a strawberry roan."

"It's my own horse," announced Joe evenly, determined to take quick advantage of this gift of the gods. "Here, Strawberry, old girl, how you feelin' this morning?"

He whistled, and the mare came up to him, nuzzling her nose in his hand.

"My own mare," repeated Joe. "Why haven't I got a right to lock up my own bronc? It's these Soup Dishers who're crooks, Sheriff. They—"

Riff, Lambert, Pete, Tucker and Goofy all interrupted with roars of rebuttal. For several minutes the barn aisle was a bedlam of angry debate. Yet it was plain that the Soup Dish crowd had lost a trick; they were on the defensive; their false lead certainly hadn't helped their brief with the sheriff. Jarrett seemed to become more and more suspicious that Riff's story was all a trumped up lie, although actually Riff had given out only the pure truth. But no one could explain how the strawberry roan happened to be in the stall.

Finally Joe made himself heard. He insisted that the sheriff go to the relief of Molly Hifeldt.

Jarrett agreed. So the entire crowd moved up the aisle toward the front door of the barn. As they emerged they were confronted by a party of men and horses —unexpected guests who seemed to have arrived during the colloquy within.

The group included three cowboys, each mounted, and four loose horses of draft breed.

Saguache Joe, at sight of the riders, cried out joyfully:

"Well, look who's here! Howdy, Steve; and Hod, you old buzzard, how's your corporosity? And darned if here ain't old Four-finger, sober for once in his life!"

Indeed here had arrived, whether opportunely or not, Joe's three friends from Sandoval. Moreover they had fetched along the two draft teams that Joe had mentioned in his wire.

FACE to face at the barn door of the Half Circle H the two groups confronted each other. One accused horsethief, one sheriff, six members of the Soup Dish clan and three newcomers from Sandoval.

Jarrett asked abruptly—

"Who are you *hombres?*"

"We're pals of Saguache Joe," announced Steve Elkins, his eyes fixed not on the sheriff but on a blood drop that fell from Joe's right sleeve and made a crimson circle in the snow.

And then Steve's eyes moved to rest upon the horsey mug of Mike Lambert

who, standing at Joe's side, was holding fast to Joe's left arm.

Joe's own attention was drawn to the little rat faced Soup Disher, Goofy. Goofy was displaying an extreme agitation. Horses seemed to interest him more than men. He was staring at the four heavy draft animals which had been driven up by Steve Elkins' crowd. And now Goofy leaped to one side and whipped out two .45 guns, crying—

"Soup Dish to the left; it's a frame."

Crack!

To the amazement of Joe, and more than ever to the amazement of Sheriff Baldy Jarrett, Goofy fired a gun point blank at Steve Elkins. At the same instant Riff, Lambert, Pete, Tucker and Stumpy all jumped to the left, joining Goofy.

Lambert bawled:

"Sure it's a frame. I see it all now. Pop it to 'em, Riff."

Goofy's bullet had unsaddled Elkins. He sprawled in the snow on all fours under his horse. An instant later every one in the crowd except Saguache Joe was shooting. Joe had no gun. Nor could he understand the sudden attack of the Soup Dish. Why, when things were going reasonably well their way, should they start a fight?

Jarrett must have been thinking the same thing, for amidst a roar of shots he yelled:

"Hey you Soup Dish, put up them guns. What—"

But just then a bullet from Lambert's gun, aimed at Joe, creased the sheriff's cheek. It made him angry, and the law immediately took sides. Jarrett drew steel and began pumping lead at the compact group of the Soup Dish. Seconds before this Hod Slavins and Four-finger Fox, although not knowing what it was all about, had come to action. Fox was blazing a stream of red flame squarely into the enemy's teeth. Slavins was hit, but clung to his saddle, firing his gun five times. Steve Elkins crawled out from under his horse, produced a gun and shot Lambert dead.

The mêlée was short. Such deadly exchange of fire could not last long. The only contribution which Saguache Joe could make to the fight was to pick up an H branding iron that lay nearby and crack Stumpy over the head. Of gunmen, there were ten in the combat. In half that number of seconds all of them except Four-finger Fox were dead or down. It was Steve Elkins, sprawled under his horse, who finished off Tucker and Riff. Hod Slavins, after knocking down one Soup Disher, slid over his horse's tail, himself shot through the groin. Sheriff Baldy Jarrett was on his knees, creased twice but not badly hurt, when the firing ceased. It ceased because of all the Soup Dishers, only Stumpy and Goofy were alive.

Goofy, by a strange chance, was unhit. He threw away his gun, fell to the snow in front of Jarrett and bawled for mercy.

"What the hell did you start this fight for?" screamed Jarrett.

"It was the deadwood, wasn't it?" whined Goofy. "They brought them Half Circle H horses back, didn't they? What I sold in Sandoval? It was the deadwood on the Soup Dish. You fellahs framed us, all right."

"If it's a frame, it's the first I heard of it," said Jarrett.

"Me, too," added Saguache Joe.

"Us too," amended Four-finger Fox.

Steve Elkins crawled out from under his horse and arose unsteadily to his feet.

"We got your wire, Joe," he explained, "sayin' to fetch along a couple of hay teams, and we done it. Why—did we bring back some rustled stock?"

"I reckon you didn't do nothin' else," admitted Joe, as he observed that the four loose horses were marching in single file, unprodded, into the barn, as though into an accustomed home. He saw their brands, now, Half Circle H.

Jarrett, Fox and Elkins seemed to be in shape to look after the dead and wounded. Joe himself lost no time in getting to the ranch-house. Once there, he found that Molly Hifeldt had but a moment before come out of her faint.

HE FOUND her in the hall, half paralyzed with dread. She had heard the shooting. Joe, unmindful of the wound in his own arm, took masterful charge of her. He refused to let her go to the door. He didn't want her to see the bodies stretched here and there on the blood smeared snow.

"It's all right," he told her. "Everything's all right. Don't worry. Sheriff Baldy Jerrett's out there, and he's handling everything."

"The sheriff!" cried Molly. "Did he catch my brother? Oscar?"

"'Course not," answered Joe, as he steered the reeling girl into her own room and forced her to a chair. "Oscar Hifeldt wasn't in this fight. What made you think he was?"

"He was here last night," the girl said.

"Here last night? Did you see him?"

"No. But some time during the night this was thrown into my window."

Molly took from her pocket a cylindrical object, wrapped in white paper.

In a flash Joe recalled the fresh mantracks in the snow, leading from barn to house and return. Perhaps Mike Lambert, thought Joe, had told the truth! Maybe those tracks were not, after all, chargeable to Lambert.

And now Joe removed the white paper from the cylinder. The wrapping was a penciled note. The cylinder itself was a fat roll of bills.

The note read:

> Dear Sis:
>
> It's better I keep moving south, but here's some money to help you take care of the ranch. I'll just stop long enough to get a fresh horse. Goodby.
>
> —OSCAR

Molly Hifeldt, for all her inbred Dutch restraint, began crying.

"Does that mean," she worried, "that Oscar stole this money and is on the dodge?"

Joe shook his head; for he recognized that roll of bills. Once it had been his own. It was the same wad that had been filched from him by the man who had stepped out from under the water tank. So then, thought Joe, it was Oscar Hifeldt who, desperate to get funds for the Half Circle H, had taken his money and horse. The rest was, of course, easy. Wanting a fresh horse last night, Oscar would hardly have exchanged for the old bay cow pony or for the yellow mule. The only good horse in the barn had been the gray gelding, and Oscar could easily have had a key to that padlock on his key ring.

So Saguache Joe shook his head.

"No," he told Molly, "I reckon your brother didn't steal that money. He just borrowed it somewhere and aimed to pay it back. The fact is he's already paid it back."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Molly; her eyes, lustrous with tears, opened wide as she looked up at Saguache Joe.

The true answer spoke in Joe's heart, although with his lips he merely said—

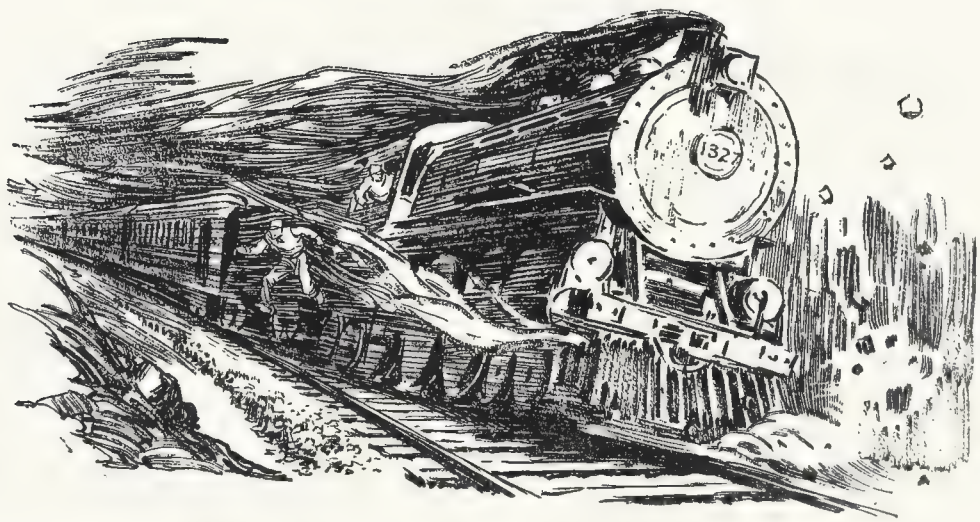
"Yes, he's already paid it back."

For he knew that he owed a great debt to Oscar Hifeldt. Oscar had bequeathed him an excuse to stay on the Half Circle H for good. How could he leave? How could he leave Molly Hifeldt? Oscar and he had exchanged goals, that was all. Joe could only wish the man good luck and a fast track, south over the mesas, on the road to Sandoval.

E. S. DELLINGER

writes of a railroad engineer who lost his nerve—and found it

IN THE DITCH



THE OZARK Division is a piece of fast track. Any railroad built over an endless succession of low, steep hills and across the narrow, crooked valleys sandwiched between, is fast track. If an engineer is to make time with even a light train he must turn it loose on the down grade in order to get it up the next hill without dragging. Engineers take slim chances every trip they make and think nothing of it. That's part of the day's work, part of the game. There are no weak kneed hogheads or conductors on this division. The orange necked, lily livered boys don't stay with the job long enough to be promoted.

But of all the good natured, fast running, chance taking hogheads on this division, Billie Jones was considered to be far and away the best. It made no difference whether the hog he rode was an ancient, asthmatic coal destroyer of the monkey motion type or one of the new Pacific passenger engines, Billie could coax more miles per hour out of it than any other man on the division. His fifth trip on the right hand side he had pulled a banana train the hundred thirty-six miles from Ozark to Winfield in three hours flat. That was a record run. No other man had ever made it with freight equipment in less than three-twelve.

But Billie had several record runs to his credit before he had been promoted three years. He seemed to know instinctively just when to shut off for safety and just when to open up for speed. He

had the instinct and the savvy of a real engineer.

But, as I said before, an engineer on the Ozark must have more than instinct and railroad savvy—he must have nerve and plenty of it. A man has to have nerve to ride ahead of five million pounds of steel and lumber and lard and coal, with that stuff following him at sixty miles an hour around curves and down grades, when he knows that if anything happens he'll be buried in the very bottom of the pile.

But Billie had that, too. Collisions and derailments had no terrors for him. He had, as a fireman, been in a dozen bad ones; and always he had come out the same old Billie. He wasn't afraid of wrecks, of the devil who causes them, or of any other thing between the blue heaven above and the lurid basement below. In fact, he had made such a record for speed and daring during his first three years running, that Old McClannahan, the division superintendent himself, had dubbed him "Casey."

NOW WHEN Old Mac, who had come up to his high estate by way of the office route, condescended to rename a greasy hoghead anything that didn't specifically connect him with some canine ancestor, that mechanical expert had a right to feel himself honored beyond measure. Casey even felt so highly honored that he had the temerity to begin making love to the old man's black eyed daughter, Betty.

The boys of the Ozark were of the opinion, one and all, that here's where Casey would go in the ditch. But they were mistaken.

Instead of going in the ditch with all his prospects on top of him, he had made another record run. In fact, so swiftly and so daringly had he made love that at the end of this very trip, just as soon as he arrived in Ozark, he was to lead the young lady down to the brown cottage on Fifth Street. Here, just across the vacant lot from the roundhouse, where he could sit on his own doorstep and watch the trains come slipping silently down into the yards or go pounding and thundering out on the road, he would really begin to live.

He was happy. Why shouldn't he be? It was May. Breath of spring was in the air. Odor of freshly plowed earth, of growing wheat, of falling apple blossoms rushed with the wind into the cab of the 1327 as he urged his train of hotshot merchandise on toward the Sunnyland.

Happy he was; and like other happy living things, he burst into song, the strong tenor voice rising above the clank of the steel scooping apron and the thunder and roar of the rushing train:

> "They gave him his orders in Monroe, Virginia,
> Saying, 'Bill, you're away behind time.
> This is not Thirty-eight—' "

The bass voice of the head shack joined in. The fireman, red bandanna knotted about his head, negro mammy fashion, placed his grate bar behind the shaker posts and stood, arms akimbo, listening and smiling happily. The train was running upgrade out of a sag. Casey reached for the lever and slipped the throttle back an inch on its quadrant. The song continued:

> "He turned round and said to his black greasy
> fireman—"

The fireman dropped a mock curtsy and, lifting the two-gallon jug from under the seat box, gulped down a big drink of ice water.

A farmhouse went rushing past. A girl in gingham stood in the door, waving. Casey waved and shouted. The fireman and the brakeman crossed the cab and waved, too. The song continued through the last verse. The train had crossed the upland and was swinging down around the curves of Brunner Hill. The cars of merchandise, yellow and red and white, were rocking back and forth like forty cradles, each swinging to a different time. The engineer glanced carelessly at the speedometer. As the needle climbed toward the 60 mark, he closed the throttle and let his train roll.

The short down grade was soon past. Though the needle still clung to 60, the gloved hand drew the shining throttle back to the middle of its quadrant, and the drumming of the exhaust drowned out the *clack-clack-clack-clack* of wheels on rail joints and the squeal of rubbing flanges. Casey was making a run for the hill beyond the bridge.

THE white milepost for Brunner siding came leaping around the curve and zipped past. Looking at his watch, Casey laid a hand on the whistle cord; and one long, deafening blast warned the train crew that they were approaching a siding. He turned to look back along the train. From the cupola window forty car lengths away, a hand was rising and falling in a highball. Casey answered the signal with two short blasts of the whistle; then, just as he struck the left curve approaching Brunner Switch, he hiked his feet against the boiler head and began a new song:

"My wild Irish Rose—
The sweetest flower that—"

High above the sound of the tenor voice, high above the deafening volley of the exhaust, piercing through the rattle and roar of the speeding train, came the terrified shout of the brakeman screaming:

"Jump! Fer God's sake!"

That was all. He whirled, kicked down the drop seat and hurled himself from the cab window. Casey jammed the throttle close up and twisted the air brake valve over to "emergency." Not until then did he look out. There, not five car lengths away from him, loomed the red target of a wide open switch. In the clear stood the caboose of the local freight. Halfway between the two was the coatless, hatless brakeman tearing madly toward the switch he had forgotten to close.

Before he could reach it—before the air brakes could more than grip the flying wheels of train and engine, the 1327 struck the open switch. The pony truck went clawing madly around the curving points; heavy drivers ripped spiked rails from oaken ties; and the engine breaking loose from coupled cars, changed ends and went rolling cab first into the caboose, with Casey inside clinging to the Johnson bar.

The caboose crumpled into bits like a crushed eggshell. A box car load of flour, forced on by the momentum of the train, hurled the black tender out of the way and jammed itself against the corner of the steel cab frame, twisting and warping it into a piece of crumpled scrap iron. Box cars and refrees,* vomiting forth whole sides of bacon, bolts of gingham, pails of lard and sacks of sugar, came on climbing, pushing, shouldering their way through the amorphous mass toward the man who lay stunned in the wreckage.

The first crash was past. Less and less violently, the rear cars crowded forward. The ramming ceased. From wooded hill to wooded hill the echoes bounded back and forth until they died away, and there was no sound in the narrow valley but the crying of steam in the broken boiler.

CASEY, partially recovering from his first shock, found himself lying on the rough corners of the mass of débris. White stifling steam poured out from the broken pipes, hiding all details of the situation from his half blinded eyes; but he could feel no pain of scalding steam, that thing of horror to enginemen in a wreck such as this. Full consciousness returned slowly. He recalled the speeding train, the open switch, the red caboose on the siding, the derailment of the engine. He shuddered and tried to arise from his uncomfortable position, only to find that he was caught in the wreckage.

As he twisted and squirmed about he could feel against the left side of his neck the cold, sharp corners of the cab window frame, and against the right side of his face and neck the hot, slick surface of the boiler sheathing. His head seemed to be caught in a trap, from which, turn as he would, he could not withdraw it. As far

* Refrigerator cars.

as he was able to tell, he was not seriously injured. He could feel the sting of pain from a dozen cuts and bruises; but he could move both arms and both legs with perfect freedom.

Reaching out blindly into the steam cloud, he began feeling about him. Everywhere he put his hand he touched only broken wood and twisted steel—the broken seat box, the wrecked brake apparatus, bent and broken water pipes.

He called to his fireman, the brakeman, the conductor. There was no answer. Soon the steam began clearing slightly. He could make out the edge of the cab window, the surface of the boiler head, the broken levers and pipes. He could mark the twisted side of the cab window, crushed in against the boiler head and jammed from the top so that it formed with the sheathing an opening in the form of a triangle. He lay with his body inside the cab, his head outside, his neck resting on the bottom of the steel window frame, which formed the base of the triangle.

He was almost startled by the voice of the conductor calling excitedly:

"Casey! Oh, Casey!"

"Here!" he replied. "Here in the engine."

The conductor and other members of the crew came picking their way cautiously through the steam and scrap to where he lay. Hastily they ranged themselves around him, trying to pull back the cab frame which held his head so uncomfortably close to the boiler, but they couldn't budge it. The car of flour stood tipped at an angle, leaning against the corner of the cab, wedging it solidly into its position.

His conductor and the engineer of the local freight looked at each other through the thinning steam, a question working on the lips of the former. High Perkins nodded his head affirmatively. The conductor dropped to one knee and, slipping his arm under Casey's head, spoke in a cheerful voice.

"Casey, old top, you're in a sort of a hell of a fix here. You ain't in no particular danger, but this damned cab frame makes a collar we can't unbutton. You're goin' to have to stay right here till the big hook comes with a torch to cut out a chunk of it. Only way we can get you out's to give you a haircut right above the shoulder. I don't reckon you're achin' to have that done. Huh?"

"Won't be the first time he's had to lay under a smash an' wait fer the big hook, will it, Casey?" broke in High Perkins in a cheerful strain. "Remember the time we turned the ole twenty-seven-eleven over up at the Gap?"

"Bet I do," responded the other, entering naturally into their mood. "Hope it don't take 'em as long to get out the hook as it did that time. We was there all day and all night. I want to get back into Ozark for my weddin' tomorrow night, sure. I don't want to miss that."

"Come doggone near bein' a funeral instead of a weddin', this time, Casey. This is about the closest call you've ever had, ain't it?"

"Miss is as good as a mile, High—miss is as good as a mile. I figgered out when I went railroadin' that I wasn't goin' to die till my time come."

SOON two of the men, who had gone to the caboose for some leather covered excelsior pads, returned and adjusted the cushions under his head and body.

"That feels better, fellows," he breathed as soon as the last cushion was in place. "Now if I just had a drink of water out of that jug of yours, High, I'd sleep till they get here with the hook."

The fireman didn't need to be told to go for the jug. Within two minutes he was back, tremulously holding a tincup to the lips of the imprisoned man. While Casey drank, the fireman caught the eye of the conductor and jerked his head significantly toward the pile of wreckage. The conductor nudged the engineer and rolled his eyes toward the rear. Old High didn't so much as flutter an eyelash, but before Casey had finished drinking, the two of them scrambled out of the pile of wreckage, whistling; and the moment

they were out of sight, they broke into a dead run toward the rear end. As soon as Casey had drunk his fill the fireman gulped a few times, then without looking at Casey, remarked casually:

"Be back in a few minutes, big boy. Got to go over and put in a fire to keep the old jack hot. So long."

But he didn't go toward the local engine. Instead he went running toward the place where the wrecked engine had first left the rails, toward the spot whence a thin line of black smoke was curling upward into the clear midday sky.

Casey's thoughts turned into pleasant channels—the brown cottage back in Ozark, the white enameled dressing table he had put in as a surprise for Betty, Betty herself and the approaching wedding. So busy was he with his thoughts that he did not for a long time see the thread of smoke. It was hidden from him by the wrecked car of flour; but as the wind shifted to a new quarter, the odor of burning meat and oak wood came drifting in to him. With a start he remembered the sudden departure of the men. He found himself wondering where they were. Lifting his head as high as the steel cab frame would allow, he looked about him. He thought he could see smoke. He sniffed the air, and his face paled just a trifle.

"Wonder—wonder if this danged outfit's afire," he soliloquized.

He ran his tongue over his lips and called out in a voice that trembled a trifle:

"High! Oh, High!"

There was no answer. A crow cawed dismally from a dead oak tree upon the hillside. A brakeman soon hurried past him, carrying two empty pails.

"Hey, Shorty!" he called.

The brakeman hesitated as if he hardly knew whether to go on or answer. Finally he came to the engine.

"What'll you have, pard?" he inquired.

"Is this mess on fire?" The question came a trifle anxiously.

"Yeah, little blaze back there by the switch. We'll put 'er out in a little bit. Don't worry."

But the shack's brave words didn't relieve Casey's feelings. He could read the anxiety in the face and it made cold chills creep up his spine. Not that he was afraid to die. It wasn't that; not yet. Wrecks he had been in before now. He had even been pinned down with a broken pipe spraying hot steam on a foot until they could pry him out. It wasn't the pain. It was just the thoughts of lying there with the fire creeping up inch by inch and searing his body, burning it into a crisp to be carried home to Betty.

He kept hoping that the wrecker might arrive before it was too late, or that the crew might be able to put out the fire, or that old High and Shorty Connor could figure out some way to move that car of flour.

Yet, as the flames crept nearer and he could hear them snapping he knew his chances were slim. He would squirm and pull for awhile, then he would stop and listen. The fire was getting closer, the roar louder. He called aloud for help and wondered why no one came.

When life is bitter, men surrender it easily. But to him life was sweet. Never before had he seen such happiness as lay ahead of him. And with the realization that life is dear and death is dreadful, a stranger, whom his conscious self had kept submerged in his unconscious, came crowding, fighting its way into his heart; and that stranger was fear, stark naked, blighting, primitive fear.

AS THE smoke curtain shut out the blue sky above, he kept calling and pulling at the steel collar until the blood oozed from his neck.

"Where are you fellows?" he cried madly. "Are you goin' to let me lay here an' die like a rat? Fer God's sake, git me out!"

But his only answer was the crackle of the flames and swish of the whipping blaze.

Soon four men, carrying a heavy piece of steel to use as a pry, came climbing into the wreckage. Just above his face

they inserted the bar of steel between the boiler head and the frame. Not a split hair's breadth could they move it. They consulted for a moment, then, removing their pry, began working on the farther end of the box car which held it wedged down. Once they jostled the car a trifle, but it settled into a new position whence it refused to budge.

Casey, his conscious, fearless self regaining full control of him, lay somewhat protected from the scorching heat, watching the black tipped flames and listening to their beating roar as they crept up the side of the car of flour. But flour burns slowly. By the time the fire had spread past the middle door, the lower end of the car was burned almost to a crumpling coal. Still with every breath from his parched lips, with every swish of the shifting wind, the odds against his chance for rescue became greater.

Forty feet from him, visible when the smoke curtain lifted for an instant, the men were frantically trying to loosen the car. With scorching faces and singeing hair, they worked on. One would throw a coat over his head, dash in for a few strokes with ax or sledge, then out to the air while another sprang in to take his place.

Driven at last from there by the terrific heat, they came to insert their pry again under the cab frame, hoping that as the car burned away at the lower end, it might drop back from its wedging position and release the imprisoned man.

As the time approached when he would surely be engulfed in the flood of fire, Casey called the local engineer to him.

"High," he stormed above the roar of the flame, "get your ax an' use it. Don't let me burn alive. Kill me an' be done with it."

High Perkins choked and backed away. He hadn't the nerve. Casey lifted singed eyebrows and looked at him sanely. He had fired for High one summer on the local.

"Use your ax, High. Don't be a coward. Fer God's sake, don't let me burn up alive!"

Again High shook his head. The wind whipped the flames into the faces of the rescuers, and they staggered back, horror stricken, leaving the pry stuck where, they had used it. Casey was left alone to burn alive—alone where not a soul could reach him. He gave a scream, the death scream of the beast of the jungle, a scream that had its impulse in that cranny of his unconscious mind where cysted in with the mortar of human habit, there lived instinctive fear.

There came a crash. A shower of sparks, a cloud of smoke leaped skyward. The box car had at last burned loose and moved a foot away from the cab frame.

High Perkins, who had lacked the nerve to use the ax, leaped again into the very flames, followed by the brakeman and the conductor. He gave a heave upon the pry and opened a hole through which the other two could drag out Casey, screaming like a maniac.

Thus was shattered the nerve of Casey Jones—the nerve with which the railroad man must keep his home and earn his daily bread.

THERE was neither wedding nor funeral for Casey in Ozark the next day. Instead he lay on a white bed over in the company's red brick hospital, moaning and shuddering like an old boozer with the DT's. His face was burned, it is true; but having been down in the wreck below the worst sweep of the flames, he was less severely burned than the three men who rescued him. In fact, Doc Burton declared there was nothing much wrong with him except shock. Doc didn't know just what the shock had really been. That's one thing a fellow never knows until he's been through it. He declared Casey should be out within a week and back at work within a month.

But even doctors don't know it all. Two weeks passed by; still he lay by the hour staring up at the plain white ceiling. If Betty or any of the boys who came to visit him should ask him what hurt him he would murmur, "Oh, nothing—just—

nothing," and shudder as if he had a chill. He wouldn't talk, and he didn't seem to want any one to talk to him. Even old High Perkins and the other two fellows, who had saved his life, couldn't get a rise out of him. They tried to kid him about the wreck and about wanting High to use the ax on him; but he only covered up his face and went crying like a baby. From that time on, though they felt sorry for him, they could do nothing but leave him strictly alone.

At the end of a month the doctors discharged him from the hospital, saying he was as sound physically as he had been on the day he went firing for the Ozark. Betty, who had never allowed a day to go by without visiting him, came to the hospital in her roadster and took him over to his room at Ma Shipton's. All the way over he stared, white faced, clinging frantically to the handle of the door like a little child, grasping and gripping more tightly every time she took a curve. She watched him out of the corner of her eye, and her lips trembled while she fought back the tears.

At Ma Shipton's he stumbled out of the car, and without so much as thanking her, he went hurrying into the house. As she slipped in the clutch and drove off down the street, her face twitched pitifully.

Still she hoped that, now he was out, he would soon be back among the men and up at the road foreman's office, chatting with the fellows as he used to. But in that she was mistaken. He spent the day in his room, moping around, staring at the ceiling or out of the window, and starting every time he heard the whistle of a locomotive.

She next tried making him go for a walk with her; but even this wouldn't work because he soon began locking his door when he saw her coming, and pretended he was asleep. Since he refused to be helped by her in this way she set to work in another direction, trying to save him from himself.

Old Mac was furious. He swore he'd fire Casey and give him a bottle and a nipple on it if it was the last thing he ever did. He raved about the cotton livered baby at home and every time his name was mentioned at the office the old man painted the air blue. If Betty urged him with those big dry eyes and that twitching mouth to be patient and give the boy time to get really well, he would go stamping out storming:

"Time! Fer heaven's sake, how much time do you want 'im to have? I aimed to make a travelin' hoghead out of 'im. Travelin' hoghead! Fer the love of the Holy Saint Louis, wouldn't he be a sweet lookin' travelin' hoghead. Why he—"

Then the old man would go straight up to the master mechanic's office and, after some preliminaries, ask the call boy to please get Casey's leave of absence chalked up for another thirty days. Not one time did he ever tell Betty she ought to give Casey up; not Mac. He was letting her manage her own love affairs.

AND THAT she was able to do and do well. One evening, when her father was at home, she sat down to the piano for a little while. He was in his easy chair, pretending to read. She knew he wasn't reading. He knew that she knew it, still he sat there with the paper in his hand while she played through one after another of his old favorites, soft things that she knew would filter through the hard crust with which his work made him encase his kindly old heart. Then before the last echo of the strings had died away she flitted over to his chair and perched herself on the arm.

"Daddy!"

He reached up a heavy hand and closed it over her soft one.

"Daddy, I want you to do something for me and for—Casey."

"Well!" grunted the old man. "Out with it."

"Daddy, I've been thinking."

"Yeah, I'm glad you have."

"You know the doctors have said all the time that—that the only thing wrong with him was—was shock—"

"Well, puss," broke in the old man, "it looks to me kinda like he'd be gettin' over his shock after while. Other men's had their wrecks an' went back to the job same as they always did. Here he—"

"Yes, I know, daddy. Other men have been in wrecks. So has he. Did he ever act this way before?"

The old man grunted. If she put it that way, he had to admit she had an argument.

"Now here's what I've been thinking, daddy. If you could just manage some way to get him out on the road and back on an engine, maybe it would bring him to his senses—sort of unshock him. Don't you see? Just make him go once. Could you manage it, daddy?"

"I dunno," grunted the old man. "I've been nosin' around in that motive department's business till they're gittin' tired of it. They've wanted to fire him fer the last— Oh, well."

Betty stooped over and gave him a smack on the left cheek. That's why the road foreman and the traveling engineer were closeted for thirty minutes in old Mac's private office the next morning, figuring how they could make Casey go back to work.

HE HAD been laying off thirty days at a time ever since June. He had never reported for service. Consequently, he was surprised when the call boy—that is, the boy who hunts up train and engine men and tells them when to report for duty—came down to his room that September evening. When he opened the door the kid shifted the nickeled lantern to the crook of an elbow and, snatching a pencil from under his red hair, opened the dirty little call book.

" 'Lo, Casey," challenged the caller cheerfully.

" 'Lo, kid," returned the engineer. "What—what you want with me?"

"Called fer banana extry at nine forty-five, Casey. You're gittin' the sixteen-spot—one o' the new jacks, jist limbered up right good. Make sixty per, slick as a top—nobody ever had one of 'em up to top speed yet— Kinda waitin' fer you to git out an' see how fast they *will* run."

While the kid was rattling away as fast as he could, he watched the engineer to see what he was going to do. Casey was startled.

Finding his voice at last, he stammered out:

"Why—why, I ain't goin' out tonight, kid. I—I'm layin' off. I—"

"Sure, I know you're layin' off; but you're subject to call in emergency, ain't you?"

Casey nodded reluctantly.

"Well, this is a groundhog case. We simply got to use you."

That kid made his living bluffing fellows into working when they had a lame excuse not to work. He told a dozen big ones every day. That's part of the game. He could lie to most of the fellows and never bat a lash. Still, when he told Casey that one, he blushed to the roots of his red hair. He hated to lie to a fellow like Casey; but he had to obey orders. The orders straight from the super's office were to *make* Casey go.

The youth stuck the book under the engineer's nose.

"Come on. Sign 'er up," he commanded sternly.

Grasping book and pencil, Casey struck a scrawl that passed as his signature. The boy went away glowing with happiness. No man dared fail to go after he had signed for a call. Furthermore, they had told him in the office that if they could ever get Casey out on the road once, he would go back to work and be all right. The boy was anxious to see him get back to work. The fastest hoghead on a division is always the call boy's idol, and it sort of smashes a call boy's dreams when his hero begins showing yellow.

As the caller breezed happily away to hunt up the fireman, Casey closed the door and dropped flaccidly into a chair murmuring to himself:

"Why, I can't go. Gawd, I can't go. I—I ain't ready to go back runnin' one

of them big jacks yet. Why can't they give me time?"

THE WATCH in his vest pocket was ticking away the seconds that brought nearer and nearer the time of his call. He pulled it out and looked at it—8:51. He had to do something, either get ready to work or else get the office over the telephone and cancel the call. He stepped undecidedly into the hall and picked up the telephone receiver. Then without calling his number he dropped the receiver back upon its hook and groaned. If he should cancel this call it would probably mean discharge from the service. For just a brief time there flashed back over him the old feeling, the old tingling of the blood that comes to the man who has been off duty for a time and knows he's soon to feel the throbbing of the engine once again.

Hastily he removed a suit of clean work clothes from his wardrobe, pulled out an old black grip and blew the dust of months from it. Then feverishly he rolled up the clean suit and an old pair of shoes and dropped them in.

By the time he reached the roundhouse his nerve was again gone from him. His face was twitching, and his legs were wobbling until they would hardly hold up his weight. He was glad when he had finished oiling around and could drop limply upon his seat box.

As he coupled into the waiting train of white refrigerator cars which stood on the lead just outside the office building Betty and her father came walking along the platform and stopped at the engine. Casey tipped his black cloth cap and sat in the window, wiping his hands on a piece of cotton waste. The girl smiled up at him encouragingly.

"Glad to see you back at work again, big boy," roared the old man, as if he didn't know Casey was working.

Casey made no reply.

"How you like the feel o' that new engine?" the superintendent yelled, trying another tack.

"Looks like she might be all right," returned the engineer without the least enthusiasm.

A light at the rear end said "test the air". Casey twisted his brake valve. The old man and the girl passed on, and Casey's eyes followed hungrily after their retreating figures.

OUT ON the road Casey fooled along. Instead of cocking the throttle wide open and sticking his feet against the boiler head, as he used to do in the good old days before he went in the ditch, he sat clutching the cab window and watching the speedometer. If the needle swung around past twenty-five, he would shut off the steam and maybe set the air.

Up in the dispatcher's office old Mac and Larry Bridger, the traveling engineer, were watching the train sheet. Old Mac was cursing and raving. As this banana train was reported through Brunner running not over twenty Old Mac whirled on Larry Bridger and stormed out:

"Fer heaven's sake, Larry, git out there an' catch No. 5 an' go on down to where you pass that damned outfit. Take that engine an' *make* that baby ride 'er. Turn 'er loose an' let 'er ramble. Either throw such a scare into him that he'll quit an' git out o' the way, or else cure him so he can go back to work. I don't give a damn which you do."

No. 5 slowed down in passing the Extra which was headed in at Harwood. Bridger dropped off the engine and, catching the Sixteen Spot, with an air of innocence and unconcern, clambered up and laid a friendly hand on Casey's shoulder.

"Want me to take 'er awhile, Casey?" he inquired casually.

"You can if you want to, Larry," was the nervous reply.

Casey slipped out of his place and, after Bridger had taken the throttle, hung himself on the edge of the seat box, close up against the traveling engineer. Bridger grimly opened up and whipped out of the siding.

There is a five mile downgrade out of Harwood, followed by a mile across the

valley, and then a heavy upgrade for three more miles. Bridger thought this would be a good place to give Casey a really fast ride. If a man could stay with that new freight engine as fast as it could run down Harwood Hill, then he ought to be permanently cured of the disease called rabbit liver.

Faster and faster the wheels of the new engine spun around. The side rods were flashes of silver in the moonlight. The canvas storm curtain, rolled and fastened above Casey's head, was knocking and thumping against the back of the steel cab frame. At every lurch of the flying engine his face became paler and his hands clenched more tightly the frame of the window and the edge of the seat box.

They were running a little better than sixty by the time they were three miles out of Harwood. Bridger shut off the throttle and let the momentum of the train keep up the speed. The cab was leaping and bounding on its heavy springs. The scooping apron between engine and tender was rising and falling with every lurch of the engine.

"Larry, fer the love o' Pete, put on yer brakes. You're goin' to go in the ditch sure as the devil."

"Oh, no, Casey. We're not goin' in the ditch. We're jist tryin' this ole baby out to see how fast she'll run."

Casey, the picture of fear—of abject, unreasoning fear—kept pleading for the brakes. Bridger paid no attention to him. He had been told to scare the rabbit out of Casey or scare him off the job. He was doing his best. Just as he opened his throttle at the foot of the hill to make a run for the grade, he turned to look back at the speck of light in the cupola window. His hand was not on the air brake valve.

Quick as a flash Casey shot out a hand and twisted the lever to emergency. Before Bridger could recover himself to think what had happened the brakes were gripping the wheels and bringing the train to a dead stop.

Turning fiercely on the engineer, Bridger stormed out:

"What in the hell's eatin' on you Jones? Say? What the hell?"

"I—I—I want off this train," he faltered. "I—I simply can't stand to ride one o' these big jacks any more, Larry."

The voice was a fearsome whine. The face was a sickly yellow streaked with black.

"I'm afraid of 'em," he went on, shuddering. "I wish they'd let me burn up in that wreck back there at Brunner."

"Aw, come on, Casey," urged the traveling engineer, laying a hand on Casey's shoulder. "That's done an' past. Forget it. Brace up an' be a man."

OLD MAC had told Larry to bring Casey back cured or scare him off the job. Clearly the curing was too big a job for him. Casey was not to be cured with a single dose, especially when he refused to take the only medicine Larry knew for lost nerve—fast running on a fast train.

But Larry had one pill left, one nobody else had ever tried. Changing the friendly clutch on the shoulder to a grip of steel, he whirled the young man about, facing the gauge light.

"Casey," he began. "Little Betty Mac's jist grievin' her heart out over the way you're actin'."

Casey's head fell forward. Big tears made white streaks through the soot.

"That's why I'm out with you this trip," continued Bridger, relentlessly following up his advantage. "Old Mac wanted me to see if I couldn't put some spizzrinctum back into you. You'd better wake up an' be damn' quick about it. This is goin' to be your last chance."

Casey was hesitating, trying to break loose from the clutches of fear.

Larry continued:

"Git back on that seat before it's too late. Run this train into Winfield like you used to do, an' prove to her an' the rest of us that you're a man an' not a scoopful of dead clinkers with pants on. Come ahead."

Casey stood in the dim light of the cab. The twin pumps were racing madly, forcing air into the trainline which his fear driven hand had bled empty. The traveling engineer turned from him and whistled out a flag. Bubble of boiling water, blow of escaping steam, wheeze of the injector—all came to his ears, familiar sounds every one of them, sounds he used to love. He squared the big shoulders and, grasping the edge of the cab frame, was in the act of climbing into his old place. Just then the unused steam reached its maximum pressure and the safety valve popped into a roar. With a cry, he turned and backed toward the gangway. As his foot sought the top step he spoke once more.

"It's no use, Larry," he chattered, trembling from head to foot, helpless before the awful fear within him. "It's no use. I've been tryin' for the last three months to make myself do it, but I can't. I'm quittin' the job here an' now. I ain't fit for Betty the shape I'm in. I'd just ruin her life if I married her. I—"

Larry gave a snort of disgust.

"Well, if you ain't goin' to take this train on in, git off of it an' sneak away where you damn' please. This is your last chance. We don't need no cry babies here on the Ozark."

Sneak away! Cry baby! Time was when Casey Jones would have beaten the general manager himself to a pulp for less insult than this; but the very conditions which called forth the remark compelled him to let it pass unchallenged. Now he merely licked the salt tears, futile tears he had shed for Betty Mac, out of the corner of his mouth, slipped down the ladder and dropped to the ground.

The racing pumps soon filled the depleted trainline. The traveling engineer called in his flag, kicked off his brakes, set his reverse in the corner and opened his throttle.

Soon the grayish white refrigerator cars were filing by faster and faster as the speed of the train increased. Bridger sat doggedly watching the rails ahead of him. Not once did he look back.

LONG before the last car had passed him. Casey realized what he had done. He knew that the act of quitting an engine on the road would bring him instant discharge from the service, draw upon him the scorn of the men with whom he had worked, the contempt of the woman he loved.

He turned his left side to the train. He bent his body forward, swaying with its motion. He raised his left hand above his head, his right level with his chest. But there in the act of catching the moving ladder, of returning to the engine he had quitted, he paused. Like the sleeper in the clutches of the nightmare, he could not move a muscle.

Slowly his fists unclenched. His hands dropped to his sides. His body sagged. His head fell forward. And there, alone in the pale moonlight, he stood while the caboose with its shivering blobs of crimson fire clacked and creaked its way out of sight around the curve. His last chance for manhood was gone.

ON HIS father's farm at the foot of Whetstone Hill, where day and night he could hear the trains go thundering across the bridge at terrific speed, Casey silently helped his father gather in the corn from the rich bottom field and build long ricks of fodder in the barnyard. With the coming of winter, he fed the pigs and milked the cows and chopped the wood as he used to do when he was a boy. But within him the years had wrought a change. Then thundering trains and humming rails had called to him while he counted eagerly the days until he could quit the farm for the rocking deck of the locomotive. Now those same sounds only frightened him away. He had no thought of going back. He had fought his fight. He had surrendered. Now he had ceased to struggle.

Still, in the evening as sun and southwind coaxed peach and apple and lilac into blossom, he would sit on the steps of the front porch and listen to No. 9, the Sunnyland Limited, as old Pat O'Neil

marked the miles with his crossing whistle. At first it made him cringe and shudder when he felt the shaking of the porch and heard the rattling of the windows; but gradually he had reached the stage where he could hear it all, unmoved. Now he would often take out the gold watch and check the time from mile to mile, wrinkling his brow into a cold frown or giving a nod of approval, as the train varied from or held to an exact mile a minute down the hill.

IT WAS an evening in May, almost an exact year since the Brunner wreck. All day he had followed the walking plow through the bottom field, watching the black earth slip purringly off the moldboard. At evening he was sitting with his father on the porch listening for the familiar sound—the whistle of The Sunnyland.

"Flyer's kinda late tonight, ain't she, son?" remarked the father, breaking a long silence.

Casey looked at the gold watch before replying. The crickets under the doorstep were chirping. From the river the bullfrog chorus came in mellow echo.

"Yes, dad," he finally answered in a low voice, "she's fifty-three minutes off now."

The two men lapsed again into silence, the father puffing away at the old cob pipe. Casey sat polishing the watch crystal with the palm of his hand. A whistle sounded up the hill to the west.

"That her?" questioned the older man.

"Nope, that's a freight coming from the other way."

The thin rind of the cut moon floated halfway down toward the western horizon. Yellow lightning flickered through the treetops in the northwest. A whippoorwill cried plaintively on the hillside above the house. The roar of the train dropping down the hill became louder. Soon the whistle rang again in one long blast, the signal for Whetstone siding. Immediately there followed another long blast and a short one.

"Nine's comin' pretty soon," volunteered Casey, reading the signal. "Extra's headin' in for her now."

"Uh-huh." The old man stroked his bearded chin.

Roar of the train drowned out the voices of night. Casey listened to the grinding of brakes and clanking of drawheads, as the train stopped at the switch. Then came the bulldog bark of the exhaust as the freight started running into the siding.

"One o' them new engines on 'er," he remarked slowly.

"So?" The old man knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Some time after the last rattle of box cars told the two listeners that the train had stopped on the siding they heard a roar far up the hill to the east, then a whistle poured out the snappy toots of a crossing signal.

"There she is, dad," announced Casey.

"What you reckon made 'er late, son?"

"Oh, engine trouble, maybe. Maybe some freight crew lunged one ahead of 'er an' laid 'er out."

"Uh-huh."

The old man liked to hear Casey's voice. He hadn't heard very much of it since his son had returned to the farm.

THE WHISTLE was sounding regularly now for crossings. The exhaust was a steady stream. Casey straightened up to listen. Then he arose and left the porch to lean on the front gate. His face was working with excitement. His hands were clutching the slabs of the gate, as if they were closing on a throttle or twisting a brake valve. Finally he whirled excitedly to his father and blurted out:

"Listen at 'im, dad. Listen at that fool run. He's clear past the schoolhouse an' still workin' steam. That ain't old Pat O'Neil. He *always* shuts off at the schoolhouse."

He turned again and stood, mouth open, listening.

"That's—that's some new bird they've put to work. Nobody made on this

division 'ud ever take Whetstone curve at a rate like that!"

He stood holding the watch in his hand, twisting the gold chain around his finger and untwisting it. The whistle sounded again for the crossing. He dropped the watch back into his pocket.

"Gawd!" he breathed. "Mile in forty-two seconds."

The dull roar of the train changed to a rumbling thunder as it shot out over the bridge; and as the bridge sped backward, it changed again to its steady roar. Then came the clatter of switch frogs, telling his experienced ear that The Sunnyland had passed the east switch and was swinging around the sharp curve past the train standing on the siding.

The short *toot-toot* of the crossing whistle was broken sharply off with the noise of commotion. Even at their distance, the two listeners could plainly hear the scraping of steel on steel, the splintering of glass windows and wooden panels, and the thud of engine and heavy sleepers as, leaping out of the narrow path marked out for them by man, they plowed their way into soft earth at the foot of the embankment.

Casey groaned. His father sprang up, crying excitedly:

"They've jumped the track! They've had a wreck! Come on!"

But Casey, recovering instantly from his first shock, needed no urging. Before the older man could leave the porch he had leaped the fence and was bounding across the meadow toward the track.

IT WAS a dirty smash. The engine, leaving the rails of the main line about even with the middle of the passing track, had shot out sidewise and turned end over end down the embankment. The tender, breaking loose from the engine and train, had glanced into the string of freight cars at the very spot where the engineer and the head brakeman of the freight, returning from lunch in their caboose, had stepped between two box cars for protection from dust and cinders. The tender had scrapped several cars of merchandise and blocked the passing track.

Eight of the Pullmans were derailed; five of the eight turned over, one of the five on its back with two others crossed above it. The superintendent's special car, which had been coupled behind, and the rear Pullman were left standing. Except for the steel equipment of the limited, there would have been a graveyard full of casualties. But, as is frequently the case, the accident had taken its heaviest toll among the trainmen.

The engineer and the fireman of No. 9 had made their last trip; and the engineer and head brakeman of the freight were buried somewhere in the jumble of wreckage that had once been red ball freight. And, racing toward the dark cloud screen in the west, the moon cast nervous backward glances upon the piled up wreckage, the snow white clouds of blowing steam, the jumbled mass of humanity, which came screaming, wild eyed, out of the ditch.

WHEN Casey reached the wreck three members of the freight crew were already there, their lanterns forming pale blobs of moving light among the ghostly piles of débris. They, with the injured conductor of the limited and his negro porter, veterans all, inured by long experience to scenes like these, moved silently but rapidly among the wreckage, calming frantic passengers and caring for the injured. Old Mac was calmly directing them. Up by the bridge a red light and a white one bobbing up and down showed where the flagman was hurrying to the telephone box to notify the dispatcher of the accident and to ask for doctors from Mountainview.

Casey joined the rescuers, working shoulder to shoulder with the men among whom he had worked for years. The faded blue cotton shirt with sleeves rolled above the elbows, the long hair dipping into his dilated eyes, the growth of beard covering his set face, made of him a different looking man from Casey, the daring

Ozark hoghead. He was thankful for the semidarkness, glad they could not know him nor sense the fear that surged within him as he crawled among the wrecked Pullmans. For, ever as he worked, there raged again that inward battle, his battle with subconscious fear, and Casey was fighting—fighting.

Once he thought he must scream from sheer fright, when as he came upon a child pinned down beneath an uptorn berth, his subconscious tormentor thrust before him the image of that wreck at Brunner. Again he could feel the cold grip of retaining steel. Again there came, half sensed and half remembered, the odor of escaping steam, the smell of coal smoke settling into low places. Again he heard the wail of the wrecked boiler. But with teeth clenched and muscles tensed he fought back the fear and worked, helping to remove the injured, one at a time, to the upright Pullman which physicians arriving from Mountainview had rigged into a temporary hospital.

All the passengers were badly shaken and frightened. Half a hundred were cut by breaking glass or bruised by their impact against unpadded corners; but at the end of an hour only three had been found who were seriously injured. Casey and the freight conductor were now working their way through the débris of the wrecked freight cars, trying to locate the engineer and the brakeman.

Casey was four feet ahead of the conductor crawling on his stomach under a smashed box car. Out of the darkness ahead of him came a low moan. He stopped, backed up a few inches.

"Well," snapped the conductor, "either go on or git out o' my way. We've got to see who's under there."

Casey crawled weakly into the dark hole. His hand came, palm down, into a pool of sticky, coagulated blood. He jerked it up, careened, and almost fell face downward upon the body of a man. The conductor came on with the lantern. He laid a hand on the face, his head against the chest. There was still life. As easily as possible, they worked the injured man out and took him to the improvised hospital.

AS THEY laid him upon a berth some one turned the rays of a flashlight into the white face. Casey gasped and started backward. It was old High Perkins. The scene at Brunner came again before him—the wreck, the fire, old High working with the iron bar until the skin burned from his face. The dim lights swam and all but went out. He gripped the berth for support. The freight conductor scrutinized him closely, gave him a stare of recognition.

"So it's *you*, is it?" sneered the conductor. "You that's afraid to go into a dark hole when you hear somebody groanin'?"

He put his hands into his pockets, turned his back upon Casey and walked up the aisle.

The doctors from Mountainview having completed their examination, one of them turned to the conductor of the limited and asked anxiously—

"Any chance to get this man to the hospital in Ozark tonight?"

The conductor did not reply at once. He was doing some rapid thinking. There was a perfectly sound engine, the new Eight Spot, standing at the water tank not fifty feet away. She probably had a little steam in her boiler, though no one had paid any attention to her since the wreck. Her fireman was still with her, but there was not another engineer closer than Winfield. One would, of course, come out with the wrecker, but that would be at least two hours.

"How soon do you have to get him there," he questioned.

"How soon?"

The two physicians consulted for a moment before replying.

"Two hours at most, we would say, and the sooner the better," one of them finally answered. "If it's going to take more than two hours, you might as well let him die here."

"We couldn't make it in two hours,

Doctor. I doubt if we could make it in two hours anyway, but our engineer was killed in this smash. This fellow we're takin' in is the engineer of the freight train. We might let the fireman here—"

"Let Casey take 'er in, Brown," sneered the freight conductor, breaking into the conversation.

"Casey?" Brown looked up puzzled.

"Yeah, Casey Jones, fastest hoghead that ever pulled pawpaws over the Ozark. There he is standin' over there shakin' like he'd seen the ghost of his dead grandmother. He *might* take 'er in."

The freight conductor gave a low, taunting laugh.

Old McClannahan, who had been a silent listener, turned and fixed his eyes upon the face of the man who had once been the fastest engineer in his service. Casey, standing there bareheaded, month's growth of beard on his lean face, let his eyes shift and fall.

There came a glimmer of lightning from the northwest, the sound of distant thunder, the rumble of its echo and silence.

Casey's downcast eyes wandered aimlessly to the face of old High Perkins, lying there white as death except where the scar of an awful burn—the burn he had received while working in the Brunner wreck—showed drawn and crimson. In that one glimpse he made his decision. Slowly lifting his head without looking at the superintendent, he faced the tall conductor of the limited.

His eyes were two swimming bits of hardened steel. He licked parted bloodless lips and spoke for the first time. His voice was a shadowy whisper, scarcely audible even in the silence of the dimly lighted Pullman.

"I *will* take 'er in for you, Brown."

That was all.

"You!" snorted the freight conductor. "You look like takin' somebody in. Why, you're scared so damn' bad right now—"

"Shut up, Shorty," snapped old Mac. "If Casey Jones can't put this outfit in Ozark in two hours, I know damn' well nobody else can."

Casey had already turned to the fireman with the whispered question—

"Got any fire in that old jack, Red."

Red nodded affirmatively and moved toward the vestibule. He had fired for Casey Jones before the latter had gone in the ditch.

Brown grasped the big, calloused hand in a short grip. Old Mac reached up and gave him an encouraging slap on the shoulder. In utter silence, each man moved grimly to the task that was his by rule or custom. Brown hurried to the telephone box to notify the dispatcher of his intentions and to ask for a running order to be handed him at Mountainview. Shorty McTavish, still doubting, ran to cut off the freight engine from its few standing cars.

CASEY strode toward the steps of the locomotive and climbed into the gangway. The fireman was there ahead of him, scattering a film of coal over the fire which he had cleaned while the rest of the crew were at lunch. The blower was driving penciled clouds of black smoke into the lowering sky.

Though the gage showed scarcely steam enough to move within two minutes the engine, coughing lazily, had passed out through the east switch and, backing up the main line, had coupled softly into the private car. While the air was pumping up Casey climbed down with wrench and oil can. A few twists of the grease plug on each wrist pin, a squirt of black oil on the groove of each slide valve, a touch here, a drop there, and he was back again in the cab. Before he rang the bell he grasped the fireman's scoop and jerking open the door, peered for a long time into the firebox.

Old McClannahan, who stubbornly insisted on riding the cab with Casey, watched critically while the engineer studied the fire. Then he scaled the seat box as soon as the other was seated and watched every movement while the train went slowly clacking out through the east switch and began its climb toward Mountainview.

Casey was handling his steam with greatest caution. The fire had been very low. It was still green and thin on the grates. A burst of speed now would throw it through the smoke stack and leave the engine stranded on the hill. But Mac, who knew precisely as much about a locomotive as Satan's son knows about the Sabbath, mistook the reason for his caution. Grabbing the engineer by the shoulder, he thundered out:

"Damn you, Casey! I thought you was goin' to take this train to town. You either widen on 'er an' let 'er ramble, or else I'm goin' to take 'er myself."

"You'll play the devil takin' 'er," snapped Casey. "I'm runnin' this hog tonight."

Old Mac scratched his head and moved an inch away from the engineer. He wasn't used to being bawled out. He was paid to do the bawling.

But as the fire grew thicker and the steam gage needle kept climbing, the hog in question began to talk for herself. She was a powerful freight locomotive, known in the shops as a 2–8–2, or a Mikado, affectionately spoken of among the men as "one o' the new mikes". She had been built according to company specifications especially to haul heavy loads of fast merchandise and perishable fruits at high rates of speed.

By the time they had crossed the west switch of Mountainview the fireman had two hundred ten pounds of steam; and Casey had the Eight Spot storming along at better than a sixty mile clip. In running by the telegraph office, he slowed to thirty-five so the conductor and the fireman could with absolute certainty snatch from the hands of the operator the hoops containing their running orders. But the instant his order was on the engine, he began raising speed.

Sixty—seventy—seventy-five, as they crossed the flats between Mountainview and Harwood, then back to sixty as they struck the curves on the downgrade, toward the spot where he had pulled the air on Larry Bridger the night he deserted his engine. He remembered the spot, the very curve and, as he passed it, he turned steam into his cylinders and ripped open the night with the roar of his exhaust.

Seventy—seventy-five, and faster, the miles melted under them as they roared through Harwood.

FOR EIGHTY straight miles the needle never dropped back of 60. Uphill, downgrade, lurching around curves, roaring through sleeping towns, he thundered on. The storm was raging outside. Vivid lightning played over cab and sawed off smokestack. Thunder deadened the ceaseless thrumming of the firebox and the *clack-clack-clack-clack* of wheels bending soaked rail joints. When beating rain dashed against the front window of the cab so he could not see out Casey threw open the side window and leaned far out into the rain watching the track ahead.

Rain washed through his long hair and down over his face, sweeping soot from out the scraggly beard; but the white that shone through was not the pallor of fear. The hunted look was gone from the eyes; the hand that rested on the brake valve was steady as solid steel; the soaked body leaning out into the night and the storm had lost its tension.

The man who sits beside an engineer in his cab must have a good imagination. If he hasn't he'll either stand up or fall off. But old Mac was hanging on heroically, imagining himself sitting down. When they took a right curve, he crushed the engineer against the cab window; when they took a left, he clutched the window sill and grabbed indiscriminately into the jumble of pipes and levers and valves to keep from falling off. Sometimes he grabbed the wrong pipe and got a hot one that scorched off some perfectly good official hide; but he didn't squeal. Even though he had long since decided Casey didn't need any urging, still he was determined to stick to that cab until they arrived in Ozark. This wasn't his first ride in a cab; but it was his first ride in a cab like this on a stormy night.

Between the Gap and Brunner is a stretch of prairie. Here for ten miles the Ozark is built straight as the bee flies. It is on this straightaway that engineers make up time with fast trains when they are off schedule. There is no speed limit.

When Casey struck it, even though he could not see ten car lengths through the rain, he left his reverse set on center and poured in the steam. The indicator swung around past 75, the last mark on the dial, and came to rest against the peg. Still the speed kept climbing. Smoke boiled straight back over the cab. The headlight was boring a conical tunnel into the dark wall of falling water. The call boy in Ozark had indeed told the truth when in September he had said they were leaving it for Casey to find out how fast the new engines would run. He couldn't coax another turn out of this one.

They had passed the middle of the piece of straight track and were approaching the curve where the Ozark bends down toward Brunner. Old Mac was hanging on with both hands, staring at Casey who was sitting like carved statue. Finally he turned loose with his left hand and plucked a roll of blue shirt sleeve. He just wanted to be sure Casey was awake and sane.

"Hittin' close to ninety, ain't you, Casey?"

No answer—not even a tremor of the big body. Two more mileposts flashed past.

"Better ease 'er off before you start down to Brunner, hadn't you, Casey?"

Without turning, Casey snarled back over his shoulder:

"Who the hell's runnin' this engine? You or me?"

Mac said no more. There was a brilliant flare of the headlight, a glimmer, and they were plowing ahead into the world of pouring night, their only light the occasional flash of lightning. The bulb had burned out of their headlight. Casey didn't touch the throttle. The fireman came off the seat box, swearing, swung up its lid, and began groping for a bulb. Casey switched on the cab light and left it burning.

The fireman, clutching bulb and flashlight, opened the cab window and swung out upon the running board of the rocking, rolling engine; but before he could work his way to the pilot, the train had come to the end of the straight track, and at slightly reduced speed, was lurching around the curves toward Brunner. Mac was watching Casey breathlessly. Casey had his head inside, watching the speedometer.

As they plunged down the hill his lips began to twitch, his eyes to dilate, his face to pale, and a hand strayed automatically over the brake valve. But in the instant that the old fear came upon him, his lips curled apart, showing two rows of teeth clenched in an ugly snarl, the snarl of the beast in deadly conflict. He whipped his head again out of the window where the rain beat into his face. He crashed by the east switch at Brunner and roared past the telegraph office without checking. Then, just as they went racing toward the west switch, the fireman twisted the new bulb into its socket and the dazzling light played over the site of the Brunner wreck—the spot where he had succumbed to fear.

The snarl of rage left his face; and where it had been there came at last the triumphant smile of the victor.

* * * *

Late in the afternoon, when High Perkins has the local freight parked in a siding for No. 31, the fresh meat special, to pass, he may turn to his fireman as the yellow cars streak around the curve and give the solemn warning:

"Look out, boy. That's that fool Casey Jones. He's runnin' like hell, tryin' to git home in time to take Betty an' the kid to the picture show."

An Old BIRD

And a Strange Night Flight

By H. P. S. GREENE

A ROW of flying officers sat and sweltered in the thin shade of a small tent on the edge of Shenannigan Field, Texas. Some wore uniforms of different origins and vintages which proclaimed them reservists, and others greasy overalls. They had assembled for a two weeks' period of active duty and, after passing their physical examinations, were now being taken up in turn for trial flights by the several regular officers assigned for that purpose.

Some, who flew mail or commercial planes for a living, and were taking a postman's holiday, were laughingly turned loose by the check pilots after one flight, with the remark:

"Take her away. You can fly as well as I can."

Others, who never got a chance to touch a plane except during two weeks of the year, required two or three hours' brushing up before their instructors thought it was safe to let them fly alone. Occasionally there were unfortunates who had gone back so far that they were not allowed to solo at all.

Since there were fifteen reservists and only three regulars to check them, it is easy to figure that until some of the reserve officers were allowed to solo, a jury of twelve men remained on the ground with nothing to do but watch the flying of the others. These critical judges watched the performances of their comrades, and hazarded guesses as to who

was handling the controls, the regular or the reserve.

They watched an Army preliminary training plane buzz somewhat uncertainly overhead with left wing low, skid on the turn and glide in to a landing. The ship came in too fast, pulled up too suddenly, pitched down and hit the ground too soon, bounced, and settled again unevenly, restrained from another bounce only by a spasmodic jazzing of the motor.

"Not so good," remarked a juryman. "Who's that in 761?"

"Lieutenant Schofield and Moran," answered a man who was keeping the list of pilots and their flying time.

The plane which had just landed taxied over to the edge of the field and stopped, and the regular officer in the front seat was seen to be holding forth in animated talk. His respondent seemed to be making no adequate reply.

"Schofield is sure bawling him out," chuckled a short, plump reservist who had already attained the median rotundity of a settled business man. "He talked to me like I was a raggedy-tail cadet. That guy is a blinger."

"He'd better be careful he doesn't talk too much to Pluggy Moran," Al French said darkly. "Pluggy and I were together in France. People think he's slow, and so he is, but once he gets started, anybody who's in his way better get out."

IN THE ship, Lieutenant Schofield was indeed talking much too much to suit Pluggy Moran. The regular, a recent graduate of flying school, was one of those rare aviators who looked as an aviator ought to look. He had a graceful figure, with broad shoulders and slim hips, clear eyes and complexion. His manner was brisk and hard. Many excellent pilots are small and wizened, or raw boned and clumsy; and there was once one who had rum blossoms on his nose. But Schofield was a good pilot and looked the part.

"You're terrible," he said to Pluggy Moran. "You fly left wing low and nose down; you skid on your turns, and you tried to dive into the ground. What's the matter with you? Who ever told you you could fly, anyway?"

"A Frenchman at Tours, in 1917," returned Pluggy slowly. A stocky, stolid man, whose nickname had been Plugger at school, he was trying to think of other things to say, but Schofield gave him no chance.

"It must have been a frog," the regular said. "No American would ever let you fly like that. Why, you even looked over the side at the ground while you were trying to land! No wonder you almost cracked us up. I think you're hopeless. I'd rather start in on a man who'd never had hold of a stick and teach him to fly from the beginning, than fool with you. Get out of here, and let somebody fly who can. Send me the next man on my list."

The reserve officer climbed slowly and clumsily out of the ship, the unaccustomed parachute dangling from his rear. Various things to say were in his mind, but none seemed to fit the occasion. He fumbled with the 'chute, and finally got the straps off his heavy shoulders. A burst of good natured kidding and quasi-humor from the flyers under the tent brought no reply. Pluggy walked slowly away toward the barrack where his room was. He wanted to think. This failure to please Schofield with his flying was an important thing to him. But he had reached no decision when Al French, who was bunking with him, came in.

"What's the trouble, Pluggy?" Al inquired. "Schofield give you the works? Don't mind that, it's only his way. He bawls everybody out like that. Has an idea if they get mad it makes 'em fly better."

"But I really was rotten, Al," Pluggy returned doubtfully. "I couldn't fly level, let alone turn; and I had no idea at all about landing."

"Why should you?" Al asked. "Did you say you hadn't flown for eight years? Did you expect to start in right where

you left off? You'll come around all right in a day or two."

"I hope so," replied Pluggy. "You know this tour of active duty means a lot to me. To be frank, I haven't done so very well in business. Can't talk fast enough to be a salesman, I guess. Now we know that flying is the coming thing, and I want to get into it from the start. If I can brush up on my flying enough to get a letter of recommendation from the major, here, I can get a pilot's job with a commercial company and break in that way. But I'm afraid I can't fly with this Schofield."

"Go on, you old crape hanger," Al laughed. "Who is this Schofield, anyway? The ace of aces of Shenannigan Field, Texas. You were flying across the lines in France when he was studying Caesar, and you ought to tell him so. I remember you. Old Pluggy, the observers' terror. Once he started out, Archie or Fokker couldn't turn him back. Observer would say when he came back with a riddled ship—

" 'Pluggy, why didn't you come home when you saw all those Fokkers?'

" 'Sent us to get pictures, so we went an' got 'em,' says Pluggy.

"Why, you made an observer ace out of Jimmy Hammerlin, in spite of himself. Took him into hell every day, and he had to fight like the devil to get out. And brought down five Boches doing it. I know you, Pluggy. Don't let 'em tell you you can't fly."

PLUGGY grunted. Next day Schofield took him up again, and then turned over the controls. To be truthful, Pluggy was about as slow on the up-take as any one could be and fly at all. The left wing would drop, and as the fact penetrated and he started to correct it, a sharp tap on the stick would come from the instructor in front.

And so it went. The nose would fall, a jerk on the stick; they would skid on a turn, a jerk on the stick. On the next turn the ship would slip a little, a kick on the rudder. Schofield was always on the controls. It got on Pluggy's nerves, and his flying became worse and worse.

When they landed for the last time, he braced himself for another outburst. That line of Al's was a good comeback—something about Julius Caesar. But the expected bawling out did not come, for Schofield was on a new tack. He merely shrugged his shoulders with an air of utter hopelessness, and said—

"So long!"

Pluggy had no answer ready for that one.

"That handsome boy has my goat," he confided to Al French at the barrack. "He's a control jerker. Can't keep away from them a minute. I can't do anything with a bird like that in the ship."

"How did you get that idea into your head?" Al asked.

"It's a fact. Queer thing about me, and I've never been able to get over it. If I'm doing anything, I want to do it. If any one else is doing it, I let him. Sort of a 'Who's doing this, you or me?' feeling. Did I ever tell you how I came to get turned loose at Tours in the first place?"

"No, you never did," replied Al, digging a bottle of Mexican mule juice out of his trunk.

"Here, take a pull at this and shoot."

"Well, it was kind of funny," Pluggy said meditatively, after obliging his bunkie. "I had De Coularé for a monitor. He'd been at the Front for two or three years, and they sent him back to Tours to instruct, for a rest. Instructing is not my idea of a rest, though."

"At any rate, he was shot to hell and nervous as a cat. He was always on the controls, like this fellow Schofield, and the more I flew with him the worse I got.

" 'Who's doing this, you or me?' I wanted to ask him, but he did not know any English, and I couldn't talk French well enough.

"After about four hours double control, he decided I'd never be able to fly and was going to have me washed out, so he turned me over to the check pilot to get another opinion on me.

"Now here's where the funny part comes in. It seems the check pilot misunderstood, and thought De Coularé was turning me over to him as O.K. for a check before I soloed. You remember how the old Caudrons had the gas tank up in front of the front cockpit, and a big empty space under it? Well, this check pilot crawled out of his seat, down on to the floor, and curled up under the tank.

" 'Fly,' he said, and then pretended to go to sleep.

"After that there was nothing for me to do but fly, so I did—made a dozen landings all O.K. and he turned me loose! And except for a little crack-up now and then, I never had any more trouble until now."

"Yes, and you'll put it over this Schofield too, some way or other," said his roommate encouragingly, as he again proffered his hospitality. "We old birds have got a kick or two left in us yet."

BUT IMMEDIATE indications did not point that way at all. On the following day Pluggy and Schofield got along even worse, but the reserve officer took the bull by the horns. After a landing he said—

"When are you going to let me fly, Schofield?"

The regular smiled with exasperating pity.

"My dear fellow, I could not have your blood on my head," he said. "To say nothing of destroying Government property to the extent of one airplane. I wouldn't dare to take the responsibility of letting you solo. Maybe in a couple of months I could make a pilot out of you. I don't know. But you certainly can't fly now."

"Maybe I could fly if you got off the controls," retorted Pluggy angrily.

"Oh, so you're the kind of a man who can't take instruction, are you?" said Schofield scornfully. "The trouble is you're so rotten I don't dare to let you have the controls."

"Don't dare?"

The regular officer's smooth face flushed.

"I believe you were supposed to be a war time flyer in that undisciplined mob over in France," he said. "Things are different now, in peace time. Flying is our business, and we don't take any unnecessary chances in the Regular Army."

But it soon appeared that Pluggy's innocent question rankled. Schofield was off for a purpose of his own. He took off in a businesslike manner and headed north, climbing all the time. Safely out of sight of any one who would be likely to report him, he started to stunt at ten thousand feet.

He started with a sudden roll that snapped back the unsuspecting Pluggy's head and then put the ship through everything it could possibly do. He ended with a series of loops, starting at ten thousand feet and finishing at two thousand. After the eighth loop Pluggy lost count. He watched the flying wires strain and loosen with each successive shock, and wondered how long the wings would stay on. Few pilots enjoy being stunted by another man—they worry about what he's going to do next. But Pluggy grinned sourly.

"Got under his skin with that crack about not daring," he thought. "And now the young squirt's trying to put it up my back. He's a whale of a flyer all right, but better men than he is have tried that little thing. I can stand it as long as he can."

When he came out of his last loop and headed for the field, Schofield looked back with a triumphant grin. But if he hoped to find any sign of perturbation in Pluggy's face, he was disappointed. The two flyers parted after the landing without a word.

"That boy certainly can fly," Pluggy told Al French.

"What of it?" Al inquired. "When I was sixteen years old I was a wonderful motorcycle rider. Didn't have any better sense. But at that," he went on, "the new generation of pilots can fly rings around us old birds, and why not? They've got parachutes, for one thing. But it's a matter of psychology, not skill,

or guts, or equipment. When we started, flying was regarded as damn' dangerous; and so it was, especially in the war time rush, with the crates we had to fly. Nowadays these boys go to flying school, and they fly. Why not? Everybody's doing it, and accidents are rare.

"They hardly ever see their friends' brains gathered up in a tea cup, or their bodies broken all to pieces, or burned to a cinder, like we used to either see or hear about 'most every day. Such things aren't in the back of their heads all the time they're flying, like they are with us, even though we aren't conscious of them. But I tell you there's still a kick in us old birds."

"Maybe you're right," said Pluggy. "But as a flyer I'm a washout as far as this Schofield's concerned, at any rate. It's a cinch that if he won't even let me solo, there's no chance of getting a letter of recommendation from the major to a commercial aviation company."

"Why don't you ask for a check by another pilot?" Al inquired.

"I don't like to do that," Pluggy said slowly. "Of course it's just as Schofield says. Flying is an Air Corps officer's career. If I should kick about him, get another pilot to check me, and get by, it might be a blot on Schofield's record."

"How about the blot on your record if he says you can't fly?" Al asked. "I know, and you know, that in France you could fly."

"But maybe I *have* gone back a lot since then," Pluggy replied. "And up to date flying isn't my career. I'm only trying to make it so. I'll just plug along. Perhaps I'll get by this Schofield yet."

BUT HE did not. The eight days' actual flying that are put into a two weeks tour of active duty dragged slowly on. One by one the reserve officers were passed as proficient, and turned loose to solo. Only Pluggy remained with Schofield in double control, flying with his instructor every day. It was doubly humiliating since the reservist made no visible progress.

Every day was a repetition of the others, a constant jerking on the controls by the instructor in the air, and his sarcasm or silent scorn after every landing.

On the last day of flying, Pluggy met the major walking along the line. The C. O. stopped him and remarked:

"By the way, Lieutenant Moran, you said something when you came about my giving you a recommendation on your flying. Did you solo today?"

"No, sir," replied Pluggy.

"Well, in that case I don't see how I could recommend you as a flyer," the major said.

"Perhaps I might do better with another instructor," Pluggy said desperately.

"I hardly think so," the major replied. "Lieutenant Schofield is one of the best pilots we have. If he says you can't fly, why then, you can't. It's hard luck, that's all. Yes, Schofield is an excellent pilot. I'm going to send him up tonight to demonstrate a little night flying for you reserve officers. We have some new equipment in the way of mobile searchlights since your day."

"Since my day," thought Pluggy gloomily. "He thinks I'm a has-been, and I guess maybe I am. Still I'm not nearly as old as he is, and he can still fly."

AFTER dinner that night a huge truck carrying an enormous searchlight and generator trundled out to the field. According to schedule this demonstration was to consist of showing how well a night flying plane could be caught and held in its beam, after which it would illumine an area of the field for the plane to land.

It soon grew dark, and Lieutenant Schofield stepped forward a trifle importantly to the waiting ship. He was to be the cynosure of all eyes for a time, and was eager for the job. After testing everything and running up the motor, he looked over the group of reserve officers standing by.

"Any one want to try a little night flying?" he asked.

No one volunteered.

"How about you, Moran?" he inquired with a sneer. "You want to take a chance doing a little night flying with the Regular Army?"

Pluggy stepped forward at the challenge. He had never flown at night, and while the idea of going it blind was not especially attractive, it would be an interesting experience. Besides, it was time he tried some night flying. Some of the mail pilots were doing it already, and it would be increasingly common as more and better beacons were erected.

A mechanic held a parachute for him, and some one obligingly thrust a helmet and goggles into his hand, and fastened the straps of his 'chute. The reserve officer, clumsy as usual, clambered into the front cockpit of the ship. It is customary in the Army for the pilot to ride in front—it is considered the post of honor, entailing more danger in case of accident—but Schofield evidently thought he would get better visibility for his night-flying from the rear.

The great searchlight was turned on. Schofield jazzed the motor and taxied out into the beam. He remained stationary for a few moments, gave her the gun, roared across the field and took off.

The ship climbed rapidly, and soon left the beam of light. Pluggy was dazed and blinded for a moment, then his eyes began to function again. Schofield was flying as well as he would have done by daylight.

There was no hesitation about his course, or about his banks. The motor purred smoothly. At three thousand feet the pilot headed for the field. The game now was for the searchlight to try to pick them up. Its bright white beam searched the sky, coming nearer every moment. At last it caught them in its dazzling brilliance, but Schofield had seen it coming and went into a sideslip. The plane was only an instant in the light. The ground men kept sweeping the beam around the sky. Dumb, they must be, thought Pluggy, for now the plane was roaring along almost directly over the field.

Then horror seized him. From the motor ahead came a burst of flame and choking smoke. Something had gone wrong and the ship was afire. The thing most dreaded by flyers had come to pass.

A hundred times, while tooling along cross-country, or getting altitude for a trip over the lines, Pluggy had figured exactly what he would do if such a thing happened, so now his actions were purely mechanical. He had no conscious thought of what he was doing or why.

He ducked swiftly out of the hot breath of the fire and clapped hands and feet on to the controls. They answered freely to his touch, and he slid the ship into its steepest sideslip and held her there. He had only one thought and one resolve, to keep the ship so, with the flames carried up and away from him by the fall until he blew the fire out, or landed; or if the worst happened, burned. But whatever the outcome, he was resolved to fight to the last.

Down he went at tremendous speed, the terrible red torch above and before him. On the field below the watchers gasped at the sight. After one brief look, the searchlight men threw their beam directly across the field for a possible landing.

During frightful seconds the flames ate closer, but after a slip of two thousand feet, drawn up and away from other fuel, they subsided as the spattered gasoline they fed upon was consumed. The fire flickered, and went out.

Pluggy sighed with relief, took her out of the slip gradually, so as not to strain fabric or struts which might have been weakened, swung round in a hairpin and landed in the beam of light.

He had accomplished the often told, but rarely performed, feat of blowing out a fire by sideslipping, and then making a safe landing. As the plane rolled to a halt, everybody crowded round.

"Good work, Schofield!" the major shouted. Then he looked at Pluggy in surprise. "But where the hell is Schofield?"

Pluggy looked vaguely around and saw

an empty cockpit behind him. It was the first time that Schofield had entered his head since he saw the first puff of flame.

"Jumped first thing, did he? The pup!" roared the major, who was a hard boiled officer of the old school. "We've got too many of these young sky hoppers around here. They're altogether too quick to leave a ship and let it go to hell Congratulations on sticking and bringing her down, Moran. Any time you want recommendations from me, you get 'em. Come around and see me in the morning."

Slowly, and awkwardly as usual, Pluggy climbed out of the ship. Everybody wanted to shake hands and pat him on the back, and some one was quick to relieve him of the heavy 'chute. As soon as he got a chance, Al French took him by the arm and led him away.

"You showed 'em something about us old birds after all, didn't you, Pluggy, my boy," he said. "Now a new load came up from Laredo, Mexico, today, and you sure deserve a snort if any one ever did. Follow me! But how on earth did you ever have the nerve to stay with her that way and not use your 'chute?" he went on curiously, as they walked away.

"If you must know," said Pluggy slowly, "and promise not to tell, I never thought of the blame' thing until I tripped over it climbing out!"

DEATH WAS A ROWDY

By JAMES MITCHELL CLARKE

THROUGH the saloons of Tombstone town
Death went stalking up and down—
Not with the tread of noiseless feet,
But six-guns banging in the street,
When Virgil Earp in a payday riot
Shot up the sons of peace and quiet.

IN OLD Cheyenne Death was not still:
Shouting the whoop of Comanche Bill,
He rode right up on a paint cayuse
With a forty-five and a hangman's noose.
For Old Man Death was a rowdy then,

Walking in daylight to get his men.
An honest gent, of blood and steel,
With a five gallon hat and a spur at his heel
He warned the *hombre* he was going to take
With the whirring buzz of a rattlesnake.

BUT NOW when Death goes walking round,
The shadows sleeping on the ground
Are not waked up by his passing stride.
He goes at night and likes to hide
Like an alley cat where the dark lies thick
And hook them in with his long smooth stick
With the scythe at the end. Or walk along
A sky high girder where the hammer's song
Rings to the rivet, and when men scoff
He gives them a push and knocks them off.
He's all for business with so many folks
That have to be killed. He simply chokes
A hundred or two in the guts of a mine
Or poisons them with turpentine.

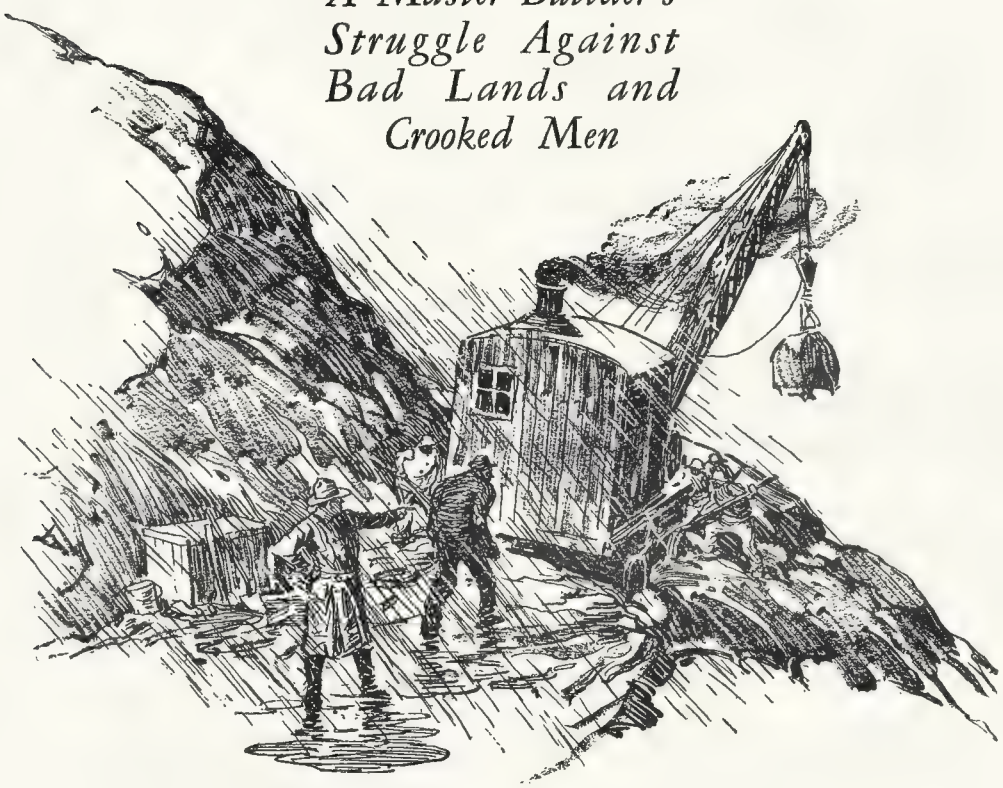
DEATH used to shoot at his victim's heels
And make them dance; but now the wheels
Of taxicabs have taken the place
Of a fighting end, and a weary race
Lies down in its bed with a last long sigh
For the days when it was brave to die.

THERE'S little time for the old romance
Or giving a chap a sporting chance.
Death's getting old and its plain to see
He's not the man that he used to be.

KING BOLT

By GUTHRIE BROWN

A Master Builder's Struggle Against Bad Lands and Crooked Men



THE MONTH was December, the place was Starfield, the atmosphere, within a certain square room, was gloomy, and the reason was the King Bolt Pass. Strictly speaking, one Mr. Garland was the reason for the month. He had taken, the preceding fall, a contract to reconstruct one hundred miles of State and county highway over the pass, which is a narrow saddle in the northern tail of the Sierra Zamora Mountains. The State and the county in which the road lay were to share equally the contract price. Besides this, the county was to furnish all blasting powder necessary for the work and also a surveyor, as concessions to its greater profit from the road.

At the beginning of winter Mr. Garland had abrogated his contract and left his job flat on its back. He took this action for causes which the parties of the first part deemed sufficient, causes which had to do with a bad habit of allowing calamities to befall his road equipment—such calamities as a tractor going over a five hundred foot embankment or a compressor crashing through a bridge into deep water. Three insurance companies, in three different States, put their official heads together one autumn morning, called in certain State representatives,

and Mr. Garland went away from that region with no lost motion.

On this December day five men faced one another in the box of an office lately occupied by the departed contractor and considered the matter of his successor. Three of these were county commissioners, whose business it was to disburse the taxpayers' money with fairness and economy; one was a State highway commissioner, whose business it was to see that the county didn't put anything over on the State; and one was a stalwart man in overalls, Cartress, who had been foreman of a road crew under Garland.

The gloom had but recently deepened. Mr. Myers, one of the county commissioners, had just submitted a bid by a Mr. Blenkin. The bid was cordially received by Mr. Myers' colleagues, who would have been docketed at once, even by a non-political eye, as rubber stamps. The State highway commissioner, L. V. Ashe, and Cartress evidenced a marked lack of enthusiasm. Ashe spoke.

"Seven thousand dollars more than the original contract price seems a little steep to me."

Myers bristled.

"You've got to take into account the fact that the work is scarcely half done and more than half the money has been spent. Besides, he has added only three months to the original expiration date."

"That would close the road to travel this coming summer."

"Can't be helped. A contractor has to give himself some leeway."

"He has enough there to build two roads," remarked Cartress.

Myers swung upon him, his thick neck turning blue.

"I can't see what business it is of yours—"

"I invited Mr. Cartress to attend this conference," put in Ashe quietly, with a look before which Myers subsided with bad grace.

"Besides that," Cartress added, "I'm a taxpayer in this county and I have a right to attend. Don't try to throw any bluff into me, Clem Myers. You aren't the man to get away with it."

"If you think—" began Myers, starting out of his chair.

"Gentlemen!" Both men sank back. "We are here," Ashe went on, "to find a man who can finish this road by the first of June, or as soon thereafter as possible. Mr. Cartress, have you thought of taking over the proposition yourself?"

"Good Lord, no!" exclaimed Cartress earnestly. "I wouldn't touch the thing with a forty foot pole!"

Ashe smiled.

"Why not?"

"I know my limitations," Cartress confessed. "Tack ten thousand dollars on to that contract, and I'd still worry my head off. Even if it is half done, so far as mileage goes, the worst of it is yet to do. With the very best of weather we can't get back on the job till March, and the ground on this north slope will be too wet to work for weeks after that. No thank you. No man can open that road by the first of June. Which doesn't say—" he looked at Myers—"that he'd need three months more to do it."

Cartress poked up the fire and threw in a piñon root, then went to stand at the window and watch the steadily falling snow. Myers cleared his throat preparatory to further argument.

"Mr. Cartress has admitted the difficulties. It therefore seems to me that the proposal we have read is a fair one. Since we have no other bids, I move you—"

"Didn't you," interrupted Ashe unceremoniously, "have something to do with getting Mr. Garland his contract?"

"Do you mean to imply—"

"Did you?" Ashe insisted.

Myers became dignified.

"The highway commission and the county commissioners agreed upon Mr. Garland. Your predecessor, I may say, sir—"

"Don't say it," retored Ashe wearily.

He glanced at Cartress, whose nose was flattened against the pane and whose attitude gave sign of sudden tensity.

"It's not—it can't be!" the road man muttered, swiping at the misted glass with an impatient hand.

The others peered out.

A HORSEMAN, looking gigantic in the storm, was riding toward the building. He was plastered with snow and he bestrode a squealing roan stallion which promptly whirled to kick at Cartress' horse, tied to a hitching rack. The rider set the stallion upon his haunches, dismounted and fastened him at a safe distance.

Cartress flung open the door.

"John Bonner! By all that's great and lucky!"

He pounded upon the newcomer and jerked at the fastenings of his sheepskin coat, pulling the gloves from his numbed hands and bringing a broom to sweep away the snow.

Ashe studied this individual whom Cartress treated like a long lost brother. He saw a man of thirty-seven or eight, just under six feet in height, who carried easily his hundred and ninety pounds of bone and sinew, and whose straight, clear glance took in each man in the room as he stamped to and fro to get his blood into circulation.

"John—" Cartress could no longer hold the question—"did you, by any God blessed chance, come to see about the King Bolt road?"

John Bonner smiled.

"Well—I heard these men were to have a meeting here today, and I thought I'd drop over."

"Drop over! From the Quintere Mine?"

John nodded.

"When did you start?"

"At noon yesterday."

Cartress eyed him quizzically, visioning the winter clogged trails. It meant that Bonner had ridden all night.

"How many horses did you kill?"

"On my word," laughed John, "not one. I used three. Got to the Saxely ranch this morning and they gave me that pink devil. He has the constitution of a tractor and rides just about like one."

During this colloquy, Myers was watching John closely. He had never seen him before but he had heard about him. The county commissioner was a little uneasy.

"Men—" Cartress stood with a hand on the back of John's chair—"this is the man who built the Keystone Highway, from Fairlee south to Del Rio. He has recently finished seventy-five miles of road through the God awfulest country in this whole State, from the Quintere Mine to Melrose. He'd never tell you these things himself, so I have to."

"That should be enough."

John good naturedly closed the subject. He was considering Ashe and Myers attentively. One glance at the two other commissioners had been enough to eliminate them.

Ashe, who had heard a thing or two about the Keystone Highway, found his interest becoming cumulative.

"Do you wish to offer us a bid?" he asked.

"I can't tell yet," John replied. "I want to get a line on things first."

He turned to Cartress, who briefly sketched the situation. John listened with an occasional nod or a question.

"All the worst of it yet to do," he commented finally. "The two really bad jobs are the Tartary slide and the road over Eagle Cliff. The slide should have been worked out last fall when the ground was dry. Can't touch it till the first of May—And the cut back of the cliff—"

"The county surveyor," put in Myers, "says that the road is to be made in the face of Eagle Cliff. That is the only way to get a good grade."

John looked at him a moment before asking—

"Who is your county surveyor?"

"Fellows. Good man, too."

"Ira Fellows?"

"Yes."

"He's the man who ran the original survey on King Bolt, isn't he?"

"I believe so."

"Well," said John without changing

expression, "it's the worst botched job in a section of this State famous for botched jobs."

CARTRESS turned to the window to hide his smile. He had suffered at the hands of the moon faced, perfectly incompetent county surveyor. John's words paid off the score.

"I suppose you think you're a judge," sneered Myers.

"I hope I am," replied John. "I've been stubbing my toes over Fellows' work for six or eight years. What he doesn't know about surveying would fill a library —and it does fill most of your county. He's been in that office twenty years, hasn't he?"

Myers' voice was deadly.

"I'll just inform you that if you have any idea of building this road, you'll have to figure on working with Mr. Fellows. The county furnishes your surveyor."

John leaned back in his chair and put a booted foot on each side of the heating stove.

"If that is a fact, I have nothing further to say. I always do my own surveying."

Ashe took this up at once.

"That service would be included in your contract?"

"Certainly."

"Well! I don't see where the county has any kick coming on that if—"

Myers interrupted savagely.

"I tell you that contract stands as it reads! I won't have a word of it changed, not one damn' word! And that road is going where it's been planned to go—right through the face of that cliff, where it belongs!"

Both John and Ashe wondered at the vicious thrust in Myers' voice. The occasion did not seem to warrant any such display of feeling. Cartress grinned openly and Ashe said softly:

"'I'? Are you the board Mr. Myers?"

"Oh, we agree!" chimed in the other two commissioners. "We have talked this all over and we agree perfectly with Mr. Myers."

"You considered the matter of Mr. Bonner offering us a bid?"

Ashe's silky voice would have warned men more obtuse than the county commissioners, and for the moment they could not think of a fitting answer.

"The old contract," said Ashe, "is void. Its terms have nothing to do with any new agreement we make, except as affects the balance of cost between county and State."

He turned to John.

"How long will it take you to get your figures on the job?"

"I have them," John told him.

Cartress admired Ashe. He had seen John's direct action methods fuddle more than one official. But the highway commissioner had his surprise under in an instant.

"Will you present them?"

"Another four thousand dollars, with what's left, and done by the first of June."

Cartress wanted to yell but he stood still, watching Myers, who actually looked as if he were swelling.

Ashe sat silent for a minute, then—

"Are you serious?"

John smiled.

"It's just arithmetic, man. Of course, I won't make a fortune at those figures, and you may have other bids. But—well, I've itched to get my hands on that road ever since I went over it four years ago."

Ashe gulped a little.

"You—haven't been over it since?"

"No."

Ashe sat back and Cartress' eyes danced with glee. Myers had held his fire as long as he was able.

"The thing is ridiculous on the face of it! You!" He pointed an accusing finger at John. "You've been over that road only once, haven't you?"

John nodded with a twinkle, inwardly a little astonished at the shrewd surmise.

"I ask you, gentlemen—" Myers turned to the others—"if we are to consider doing business with a man who guesses like that, who gives a snap judgment on a matter of such magnitude, where the people's money is involved, and who

stoops to the insufferably petty trick of calling in question the good name of a county officer of long and honorable—"

"Oh, for Pete's sake!" Cartress could stand no more. "When I think of all the times I have wanted to punch Fellows' head! And when I think—" he suddenly warmed up—"of all the money—money that we've paid in taxes—wasted, thrown away, burned up! How? Trying to follow the wriggles of that wooden headed engineer over the face of this county! That's how!"

He stepped closer to Myers and shook a finger in his turn.

"And where do you get off? That's what's hurting, ain't it? No brother-in-law contractor—" John and Ashe moved a little at this—"to turn a bright nickel for an obliging commissioner. And how in Sam Hill are you going to be able to pad the county payroll, without even a surveyor on the job? Hell of a fix you're in! People's money! Why—"

"Better can the oratory, Cartress," suggested John, seeing light at last and trying to keep his face straight.

Ashe turned to the apoplectic Myers.

"Is Blenkin your brother-in-law?"

"Y—y—yes, h—he is!" Myers was so enraged that he stuttered. "Wh—what the devil's the m—m—matter with that?"

"Not a thing, probably," responded Ashe, "but you know the custom. Mr. Bonner's bid is before us. What shall we do with it?"

MYERS sat still and let the waters roll over him, giving no sign of life but a glance of contempt at the timid yeas of his fellow officers. They wished to be loyal but they did not like the peculiar glimmer in the eye of the highway commissioner. Not at all.

A few hours later Myers, ruminating with down drawn brows, gave vent to three opinions.

"There are ways. Yes, ways— Damn him! Besides, it isn't possible. The thing can't be done!"

About the same time Ashe reminded Cartress—

"You said no man could finish that road by the first of June."

"Oh," Cartress answered with entire seriousness, "*John* can do it!"

JOHN had given himself too narrow a margin. He realized it at the time he made his agreement and he realized it more fully as the work progressed. But he had known very well what it meant to that entire corner of the State to have the King Bolt road open by the beginning of summer. It meant better times for every farmer and rancher and country storekeeper who was served by the highway, because of the tourist trade and the cross State truck traffic that flourished through the good weather. The big contractor did not think such considerations out concretely, but they invariably entered into his calculations.

He found just what he had expected to find, after a casual acquaintance with Mr. Garland—sections of highway, which were supposed to be finished, that he could not, out of professional pride, let stand; grades too narrow, ditches too shallow, road crowned too high or not at all, curves dished the wrong way.

He had established three camps by the last of February and before the first of April he had picked up all the tag ends in the fifty odd miles he was not expected to touch, had reduced the camps to two and was, as Cartress put it, hitting on twelve. He needed to. Sixty days left and the bad end of the job ahead.

On the twentieth of April he broke camp once more and moved all tents, supplies and equipment to the Starfield side of the pass. Here he established a single camp, halfway between the Eagle Cliff and what was known as the Tartary slide.

That evening the men crowded into the dining tent to have the work laid out. John looked them over. Thirty men in dusty shirts and overalls, the pick of the gang with which he started. Thirty good

men, thought their boss. They'd go through if any thirty could.

"Stan."

Young Stanley stopped teasing the camp cat to look up.

"Put the compressor on top of the cliff tomorrow," said John, "where you won't need to move again till the cut is done. Drop her in to the hubs, so she can't rock, and lay your pipe and hose both ways. Nash and Digby will help you."

Nash, a driller, asked—

"Shall we load scrapers then?"

John grinned.

"Tom and Whaley will have the rock uncovered before you get set up."

"Aw!" Nash looked his frank incredulity. "It ain't that close to the surface!"

"Want to bet?" asked John.

"Cripes, no!" retorted Nash. "I ain't forgot them five dollars I lost to you over the age of that mule."

When the laugh died down John laid out the work for the rock men, asked the blacksmith how much sharp steel was ready, made note of Digby's complaint about a defective air hammer, and agreed to a teamster's statement that he must lay his horses off a couple of hours for shoeing.

"Folsom wanted me to ask you, John," Nash here put in, "if you would let him work with the rock crew."

"Why doesn't Folsom speak for himself?" John inquired.

"He's helping the cook stow the grub."

John hesitated. The man Folsom had come to him for a job the first of the month. He had walked from Starfield to see whether he could not get work with the road gang, and John was not able to refuse him although the man had all the signs of incompetence. The contractor was not influenced to this opinion by the threadbare clothing and broken shoes. The signs were in the face. John had put him on as flunkey. The cook could do with a little help and Folsom would be as much out of the way there as anywhere.

Nor was John holding against the man the accident which had happened while they were moving camp. Folsom, in charge of a wagon load of supplies, had unhooked his team for noon and taken them up the road to a spring for water. While he was gone the wagon rolled across the inadequate block he had used and plunged over a bluff into Tartary Creek, getting away with material to the amount of some three hundred good dollars.

"No," John at last answered Nash, "I guess Folsom better stay where he is. He'll do more good there.

"Sept—" John turned to the shovel man—"you can begin on the upper end of the slide in the morning. Keep your machine well in and your eye peeled for breaks. If there is anything that doesn't look just right to you, *back out.*"

Sept nodded eagerly, his little eyes, a queer contrast to his heavy frame, intent on the boss.

"Every night bring her up, clear of the bad ground. We can't take the least risk in there."

THIS was the one piece of work that worried John. It was not strictly slide ground but a loose combination of clay and boulders, an outcrop overhanging Tartary Creek for an extent of five hundred feet. Each year it slid down, sometimes only a yard or so, sometimes a dozen yards, blocking the highway. There was no escaping it. The road had to go through it. The melting snow above it had kept it soaked so that even by the first of May it was too wet to work to much purpose or any economy.

But Sept nosed into it for ten hours a day and was making a good showing when the spring rains began. One night he left a hundred yards of eighteen foot road, all in the clear, and the next morning there was no road at all. The hillside had lurched into the gap provided by man, leaving not a trace of his toil.

John explored the yawning cracks above with a thoughtful eye. If he could just shoot the whole confounded hillside into Tartary Creek! But that

formation didn't shoot, not worth a copper. He stood with Cartress viewing the devastation, while the rain sluiced over their shoulders and the thunder rolled along the mountains.

"What can we do?" For the minute Cartress was nearly in despair. "We'll likely have two or three weeks of storm."

"We'll have to wall it," concluded John. "That means you." He smiled at Cartress. "Pick your own men. Set your stone in cement and build to hold the mountain. Keep at Sept's heels. He's bucking into it again already."

They watched for a few minutes. The shovel man had lost no time. He was doggedly returning to the grapple with work that was maddening in its difficulties and delays. He evinced no irritation with rocks that refused to roll but settled stubbornly into the muck, or vast gobs of clay that stuck on the dipper teeth and must be pried loose by hand.

Cartress shook his head amazedly.

"I'd be a raving maniac in three days at that job."

John agreed. "He has the most astounding patience. There isn't one of the rest of us who wouldn't have aired his views at such a wreck of his work. But Sept just gave one look at it and dug in."

Here Digby, one of the drillers, joined them.

"John, we're out of TNT."

"What!"

Digby nodded.

"We put the box up on the compressor last night when we quit work, and covered it good. By golly, it *couldn't* have slid off! Stan said it was all right when he left; but there it was this morning, busted wide open. The rain sure made a lovely yellow mess of it."

John looked again at the slide.

"We can't get a wagon down to Starfield. Digby, bring the men at the cut with picks and shovels. We'll build a trail above the slide and down to the road again. Cartress, find out how many animals we can pack and have Whaley get them ready. He can go for the powder."

It took most of the day to build a safe trail in the saturated mountainside, and Whaley got started only a little before dark. He thought he could make it back by the next night. He did not come for three days.

"That means," said John, "that the powder I had ordered was not at Starfield."

John did not mention Myers, but Cartress knew of what he was thinking.

THEY found plenty to do, but the delay hit them hard. They would be later now finishing the cut than the slide, and it was an open question whether Whaley could keep the powder dry on packhorses. However, a generous expenditure for oilcloth solved that problem, and Whaley arrived in triumph with enough powder to finish the work.

"What did you say to him?" Cartress asked when he and Whaley were alone. The two had exchanged opinions of Myers before the trip.

"Something told me to go to the storeroom, as soon as I hit Starfield that night. I got him out of bed—two A.M., man. That Hartstown operator sat right on the button till she woke him up. He sure was mad. But I was just as mad as him and I was wet. He said it was storming so hard that it'd be impossible to get out to the powder house. I told him to get that shipment on the express car tomorrow morning or I'd put such a kink in his tail he'd never get it straight. Myers and me was neighbors once," he added explanatorily.

At eight o'clock that evening, while John sat frowning over his rough and original but perfectly adequate bookkeeping, a head was thrust under his tent flap and a voice said—

"Come into the dining tent a minute, will you, John?"

John nodded absently and the head was withdrawn. Fifteen minutes later he remembered the request.

Every man in camp was in the big tent and a queer hush fell upon them as the

boss entered. He looked at them curiously and his eyes smiled his question. What were the boys up to?

Cartress rose with the embarrassed self-consciousness of a grammar school graduate. He had been appointed spokesman and for the first time in his memory couldn't say what he wanted to.

"John—I—you—that is, we—damn it all, quit your grinning!"

John's grin widened. He hadn't a notion what was in the wind, but the sight of the vociferous Cartress in search of words was too much for his gravity.

"It's this way, John," supplied Whaley. He hadn't been chosen spokesman, so he experienced no difficulty. "The days are long enough now that we could just as well put in twelve hours as ten. And we're going to need every one of them 'unforgiving minutes'."

The last was a fling at young Stanley and his favorite quotation.

The smile left John's face and he looked steadily at them. He saw the thing for which they could not find words, for which there were no words. It was not the consideration of the dollar or so extra a day they'd earn. It was the unbuyable and unbeatable loyalty of tested men, that fidelity which stood in John's heart beside the work itself. He felt something rising in him which was very close to tears. For a few seconds there was absolute silence in the tent. Then John said quietly—

"Twelve hours is a long day, boys."

"This is the eighth of May, John." That was Cornish, a pick and shovel man, who knew the length of a day.

John nodded thoughtfully.

"Three weeks, and two days," said Cartress. "With the breaks we been getting, we ain't got one hour to lose. We got to do it, John."

THE NEXT afternoon a man rode into camp through the downpour who, after shedding slicker and waterproof hat, was discovered to be Ashe. He explained that the weather being what it was all over the State, this seemed a good time for his official inspection of the road.

The crew, to a man, fell for Ashe. He didn't mind the storm, nor the mud, nor damp clothes, nor wet floors, nor too much water in his soup or his blankets. He brought a bundle of magazines with him and three new decks of cards. He repaired Stanley's guitar and persuaded the blacksmith, Dane, to dig up an ancient harmonica.

When Ashe stepped into John's tent after the nightly hour of uproar under what Cartress called the big top, he looked and felt happier than he had for years.

"I know now," John told him, "what that word morale means. You've done wonders. These boys have been hitting a killing pace for seventy-five days. They're lean as grayhounds and I didn't suppose there was any spring left in them. But they're taking this twelve hour shift like a bunch of kids on a vacation."

Ashe gestured away any responsibility, and sat down to watch John's struggle with primitive bookkeeping. The highway commissioner wondered whether this big, quiet man ever thought of himself. It wasn't hard to see that he, too, was tired. His eyes were a little heavy and his clothes hung loosely upon him.

In fifteen years highway experience over a dozen States, Ashe had never encountered the like of this road boss. The commissioner had known that he need not concern himself about the work on King Bolt; but his position gave him excuse for a visit. Down inside he acknowledged a boyish desire to see John again. It was two decades since any man had warmed his heart as this one did.

THE NEXT morning Ashe was roused from sleep by excited voices and the pound of running feet. When he opened his eyes John was already nearly dressed.

"What is it?" demanded Ashe.

"I don't know," answered John, still half drugged with slumber. "Something down at the barns."

Ashe followed as quickly as he could and heard a man shout as he ran toward the dining tent, calling profanely upon the name of Dane, who had not yet wakened.

Ashe began running himself, stirred by a conviction of disaster. He crowded into the knot of men at one of the barn entrances and saw four horses standing inside in the queerest attitude he had ever seen horses stand. Their hind legs were drawn forward under their bodies as far as physically possible for an upright position. They swayed a little, with drooping heads and flaring nostrils, their muscles twitching and trembling. Even to Ashe's inexperienced eye, it was evident that the animals were in the keenest distress.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Founder," a man answered. "They got into the oats last night— Are you gonna try to throw 'em, John?"

"We'll have to put them down to get their shoes off," was the answer.

The men rigged ropes and with a few deft turns had one horse stretched out on the grain strewn floor. The next animal fought to keep up and knocked down one of the others.

"Saves that much," remarked Cartress, coughing in the dust.

The blacksmith arrived and began the difficult work of removing shoes from the tender feet of the stricken animals.

"Don't they bleed them for this, sometimes?" asked Whaley.

One of the teams was his and the pride of his heart. The other two horses belonged to John, who nodded.

"Do any of you know how to do it?"

No one did, or knew so little about it that he was unwilling to take the risk.

"We need aconite," said John, "and we haven't a drop. Somebody see if the cook can't dig up some saltpeter. And get a scraper load of that clay from the slide. We'll wrap their feet in that, when we get the shoes off, and keep it wet. That ought to help the fever."

He was holding down the head of a horse as he spoke, soothing the great brute with a steady, caressing hand.

"Can we get along with what horses we have left?" asked Cartress.

John considered.

"It will take two days to get them from Starfield and that means one man's time. I believe we need the man worse than we do the horses."

IT WAS the middle of the forenoon before most of the men got to work. Cartress followed John into the tent where Ashe was writing a letter, seated himself deliberately and looked at his chief.

"John, I smell a rat!"

John, searching for his time book, asked good naturedly:

"What kind of a rat? Mountain rat or pack rat or plain house rat?"

"I don't know, but it's a darned fragrant rat."

John met his eyes fully and waited.

"Somebody left that barn door open," said Cartress.

"Yes."

"Well, Stan went down for a piece of leather to fix his boot heel about eight o'clock last night."

"Well?"

"And I asked Stan if he closed that feed room door."

"I heard you."

"You did? Well did you see him turn red when I asked him?"

"Anybody would have turned red at your tone, Cartress. Stan is a sensitive fellow. And don't make any mistake. He's straight as a string."

"That box of TNT," said Cartress significantly, "fell off the compressor, in some very strange way."

"Yes."

"Well?" asked Cartress.

John did not answer and Cartress knew from experience that he would not. When there was nothing to say, John had an incurable habit of not saying it.

The rain had stopped but the weather had not cleared. Fat, greasy looking clouds hung low on the mountains, and a slight, cold wind tugged continuously at the canvas walls of the camp.

"It's fixing," Cartress told Ashe, "for the God awful windup that a storm in these mountains has generally got in its tail. When it comes it'll maybe last two hours and maybe twenty, but at any old length, you can gamble your soul that what we've had before will be fig syrup to cyanide. Dane calls it a cloudbust, but I got another name for it."

Ashe had left John wielding an air hammer above camp and had come down to view Cartress' new wall, and watch with never failing interest the endless ingenuity and calmness of the man on the steam shovel.

Sept had claimed the attention of Ashe from his arrival, not only as a workman but as a man. The dark little eyes, set under shaggy brows, shifted instantly from any glance; but Ashe had discovered that they had a trick of shooting back, when Sept thought the glance removed, and seeming to take in every detail of their object.

Though he seldom spoke and still more rarely smiled, the shovel man had contrived to impart his liking for Ashe. The latter caught Sept's eyes fixed on John one night with a look of such devotion that the highway commissioner suddenly understood the reason for that liking. Sept had seen that Ashe approved of John.

He nodded briefly now and motioned to a box that might be used as a seat on the pitching platform. Ashe preferred to stand and for an hour operated the trip for Sept, since he was working short handed, thanks to the pressing need of men at the cut.

AS THE crew on the slide walked back to camp after work they met young Stanley coming down the road.

"Sept," he asked, "have you a three eighths socket wrench?"

"Yeh," and Sept told him where to find the tool in the shovel cab.

Ashe saw Cartress turn and look after Stanley as he went on down the road in the gathering dusk. Something in the manner of the eight or ten men seemed to tighten. They exchanged looks with Cartress and walked on in silence.

Ashe noticed Sept's glance slip from face to face, and the commissioner suddenly guessed that Sept did not share in this suspicion of young Stanley. And he felt, strangely, that Sept knew more than the others. About what? About these unexplained accidents. Ashe was beginning to be uncomfortable. Something sinister, under the surface, was abroad in this camp.

Ashe watched Sept all evening but saw nothing unusual except that the shovel man insisted on sitting by the kitchen stove, where he seemed a good deal in the way.

At nine o'clock that night, after most of the men were in bed, the two dogs in camp raised a sudden uproar. John stepped outside to quiet them and in the pitch darkness ran into a horse.

"Hello! Hello!" snapped out of the air above him, and he recognized Myers' voice.

There was no undue cordiality on either side, but both managed to preserve an appearance of civility. If John got any entertainment out of the fact that the only available bed in camp was one half of Cartress' bunk, he didn't show it.

After the visitor was fed and warmed the camp once more settled down for the night, only to be again routed out in the early morning by a startling discovery.

The cook's flunkey, Folsom, had disappeared. There was not the slightest trace or clue as to what had become of him. If he had gone up in smoke he could not have more totally vanished. After a couple of hours' fruitless search and speculation, John ordered the men in to breakfast.

JOHN was not ready to admit that things were beginning to get on his nerves, but he had got to the place where he wondered how long his run of luck was going to last. When Ashe touched him on the arm unexpectedly, he felt an actual tremor

of his muscles. The low voice did not add to his calm.

"John, get Sept into your tent on some pretext."

The road boss looked intently at Ashe for a moment, then turned to glance over the men as they scattered to work.

"Sept," he called, "did you measure up last night?"

"No."

"Step up here a minute, will you?"

Sept and Ashe followed John into the tent, and he looked inquiringly from one to the other.

"Sept," said Ashe with a smile, "what became of Folsom?"

Sept's gaze leaped from the commissioner to John.

"He went down the road," was the prompt answer.

"Why did you send him?" continued Ashe.

"He was tryin' to bust the shovel."

Sept answered Ashe but he looked steadily at the amazed John.

"How?"

"Loosenin' bolts."

"You saw him?"

Sept nodded.

"He thought it'd be laid on Stan again."

Partial light broke over John, and he sank into a chair.

"But why?" he asked. "What was his idea?"

Sept shook his head.

"That wagon goin' into the creek wasn't no accident, neither. No more'n the powder and them horses."

"But," inquired Ashe, "why didn't you tell John long ago?"

"I was just guessin'."

"Yes, but—"

John made a quick gesture and Ashe comprehended that for some reason he must not press this point.

"Did you—" John felt some delicacy in putting the question—"did you do anything to him, Sept?"

"Jest told him to git for Starfield or I'd take him apart."

After a pause John smiled.

"Thanks, Sept."

The man turned abruptly and walked out.

The two in the tent looked at each other. There were things that both of them wanted explained. To John's question, Ashe told of the meeting with Stanley the evening before, the conclusions he drew then, and the startling click in his mind that morning when he heard that Folsom was gone.

"I'd noticed Sept sitting by the stove and I remembered that he had followed Folsom out when he went to bed. It came over me this morning that Folsom was at the bottom of the dirty work and that Sept was trying to catch him in the act. But why hasn't he told you before?"

"Sept can't talk to me alone."

Ashe frowned his perplexity.

"He just seems to get tongue tied," explained John, "and there wasn't anybody he'd talk in the presence of till you came. He wanted to tell me, I could see that just now, and he's sorry he didn't, but he couldn't help himself."

Suddenly Ashe remembered an adored teacher of his boyhood, before whom he was always smitten dumb if the two of them were by any chance left together. In the presence of others he could talk freely with the man, but the boy's love invariably closed his throat when they were alone.

"What I can't understand," went on John, "was the fellow's object. He seemed down and out when he came into camp. Why should he—"

John stopped abruptly. For no reason at all he had thought of the impatient voice in the dark last night. The connection had occurred to Ashe some while before, but neither had the slightest provocation for such an idea, so they made no mention of it.

THE THING that both men were incapable of comprehending was the mind of a bully who had never been successfully crossed. They did not guess the depth of hate for John that was born in Myers'

heart that December day in Starfield. To increase the antagonism was added the loss of the contract and Cartress' pitiless exposé.

When Myers began to realize that John was actually on the way to fulfilling his contract, the county commissioner remembered just the man he could use. He and Folsom had done business together before.

"Work on the sympathy of the cursed soft fool!" the commissioner had ordered Folsom, and added foulness without measure as he laid down further directions.

Folsom was to get on the rock crew, he was to learn to handle powder and he was to watch his chance for a disaster that should delay the work hopelessly. In the meantime he was to do any and all dirt possible.

"Get it laid on to some pet of the double crossin' son o' hell!" was the final admonition.

Folsom was to be well paid. The remuneration did not come out of Mr. Myers' pocket.

The agent had been able to get but one report to his principal and that had so disquieted Myers that he seized the first opportunity to look over the ground himself. He had not known of the presence of Ashe until he arrived in camp. Another enemy! A smart one, too, one he'd have to watch. Bonner could sweat for that, also.

The disappearance of Folsom, before Myers could have a word with him, scored heavily on the same side. He dared show no interest in the lost man and he did not miss the fact that the bewilderment of the crew was genuine. Also he was keen enough to see, at the noon meal, that their bewilderment had vanished.

He made a cautious inquiry or two and got evasive replies. Finally he put the question squarely to John, who answered, looking Myers in the eyes—

"Folsom went to Starfield."

"How'd you find that out?"

"A man told me," replied John.

Myers' hate very nearly leaped into his face. He dared not ask further.

IT WAS becoming apparent that Dane's "cloudbust" was on the way. The rain began again just before quitting time that night, starting slowly with a business-like drizzle that in an hour turned into a flood. Everything had been made as tight and snug as possible, but by eight o'clock tents were leaking and water was beginning to ooze through the dirt banks that protected the sanded floors. Men shifted bedding and clothes and supplies about in the effort to keep them dry.

John was cramming a drawer with papers when Cartress crawled through the tent opening, shook himself like a dog, unbuttoned his slicker and sat down. He looked from John to Ashe and they saw that he had something momentous on his mind.

"He's a deep one," came finally and, at their questioning glance, "Myers, I mean."

He smiled grimly at their change of expression.

"You remember," he said to John, "that Whaley packed that TNT in fifty pound ore sacks when he brought it up from Starfield?"

"Yes."

"Well, he found a bill slipped under the lid of one of the boxes he emptied. He stuck it in his pocket, meaning to give it to you, and forgot all about it till we were putting extra cover over the powder just now. He gave it to me and when I was back in my tent I took it out—and got an eyeful."

Cartress handed a small piece of paper to John, who looked at it for some time without moving. He passed it to Ashe who, after a brief scrutiny, looked up.

In a silence so complete that the ticking of John's watch hanging above his table was plainly audible, the three looked at one another. They were all experienced construction men. It was their business to know costs and freights and margins. The little yellow sales slip was as obvious as a wart on a nose. Finally John spoke.

"We had better have Mr. Myers in."

Cartress stood up and John asked—

"Does the weather show any signs of breaking?"

"Black as Hades," answered Cartress, not understanding the shift of subject.

"Will you see Sept," John requested, "and have him move the shovel up on top of the cliff? That whole hillside may go bad if this keeps up. Tell him to put it beside the compressor. Hunt up Stan, too, and have him put his gasoline barrels out of harm's way. We haven't had much lightning yet, but there's never any telling."

Cartress' look of bewilderment had been gradually replaced by a broadening grin of understanding.

"John, I'll be so awful damn' good, if you'll only let me stay and see the fun!"

John smiled.

"It's not all stall. I was going out to attend to those things myself, but I'll have to talk with Myers. And you can't be good, Cartress. You hate him too bad."

Cartress' rueful look admitted the justice of the conclusion.

"Better go, boy," John added.

Cartress turned to Ashe.

"Will you save me every gory detail?"

Ashe promised, laughing.

MYERS settled himself into the chair vacated by Cartress and surveyed the two before him coldly. He suspected that they wished to suggest an extension of time on the contract of the storm. He'd see them in hell first!

John handed him the yellow slip.

The commissioner looked at it and saw instantly what was up. If they thought they had him there— His cool smile showed that he understood and defied them to do their worst.

"Well?" The glance he dropped over them was peculiarly insulting.

"It is not very well," said John, his mouth setting in lines that Ashe had not seen before. "We know what TNT costs. It can be laid down at Hartstown for seven and a half cents. I—"

"It can't be anything of the kind!" Myers sat up furiously. "That stuff costs us nineteen cents on the freight platform. I'll show you any amount of bills to prove it!"

Ashe tried to speak, but Myers swept on:

"Then it's got to be moved within the hour. More expense. Then it's got to be taken from the powder house back to the railroad to send to Starfield. Expense! A hell of a lot you know about running the county's business, you big oaf, you! You—"

"Shut up!"

John's tone was low but his words had all the startling impact of a shot.

"Keep your voice down. Now Myers, you can bluff from here to Halifax, and you can show all the papers in your courthouse, but we know and you know what blasting powder costs. Also we understand why you wanted the road built through the face of that cliff—take just about ten times the powder I have used. For a cold blooded steal—"

Myers was on his feet with a roar. He was a beefy man, heavier than John.

"G-get up, you y—y—yowling son of a t—t—tom cat! G—get up!"

John looked at the convulsed face above him. He had never wanted more ardently to accept an invitation.

"You need a good beating," he conceded, "and I'd be happy to oblige. But that isn't what we are getting at. What we are discussing is the price of powder."

He knew that a seated man has some advantages, especially if he watches his opponent's eyes. Myers backed away and tried to look as if he hadn't.

"Sit down," ordered John, and when Myers had obeyed, "I asked you to send me picric acid. It's cheaper and it's—"

Myers sneered.

"And do you think the county is going to run around filling your blasted gill cup orders when it has a supply of something better on hand?"

"It isn't better," John retorted, "but you explained the matter and I took the TNT. Naturally, under the circumstances, I did not concern myself with the

price, after you stated so positively that it would cost you more to get the cheaper powder."

"Then why the hell are you concerning yourself now? What devil's business is it of yours if it costs a dollar a pound?"

The shovel roared through camp on its way up the road, and for a few minutes no one could be heard. Then Ashe spoke for the first time.

"If you can't see the point in a contractor's standing out for mere honesty, maybe you'll get the State's slant on the matter."

Myers laughed aloud and wanted to know what business the State had butting into strictly county affairs?

Ashe continued calmly.

"Do you know that there is a law requiring you, when the work is done, to furnish the State auditor with an itemized —and witnessed—account of all expenses incurred *outside* the contract price?"

Myers rose slowly, staring. If they had needed any proof of his guilt, they had it now. He swayed a little, like a steer on the edge of hysteria. To his cramped brain John was in some way responsible for this, too.

The others came to their feet, on guard before the rising madness of baffled fury that they saw in the man's face.

Then— The three stood still as frozen men, the blood draining from their faces, from their very hearts. They had felt that which can lay low the highest courage. They had felt the ground beneath them move.

The next instant they were trembling as if the movement had been communicated to their muscles and they were scarcely able to believe that it was not continuing, that they were not being swept helpless into the cañon below them.

After the first flash of horror, John was his own man again. As the frightened crew plunged from their tents, he met them with ringing orders, with clear and specific directions, with jokes and encouragement, and a perfectly genuine laugh.

THE LAUGH did it. John wasn't afraid, so what need any man fear? They tossed his jokes back at him, sprang to obey his commands, maintained a semblance of order in what was inevitably more or less chaos.

They toiled like demons, and looked like them, whenever a lantern beam caught their dripping, straining bodies and mud smeared faces.

Ashe, straining and dripping with the best of them, realized that it must be a sufficiently onerous task to tear up and reestablish a road camp under the best of conditions. When it was done in the pitch darkness of a deluge, with only lanterns for light, and with the fear of an extremely ugly death stepping on men's heels, it had every aspect of nightmare and stood every chance of becoming panic.

But again and again Ashe heard John's voice calling to man after man by name, suggesting, commanding, hurrying, centering the tumult and movement, forcing it to amazing accomplishment.

"King Bolt!" thought Ashe, and was immensely elated at his metaphor. "But he never thinks about being one. That's the wonder of him."

John, heaving on one end of the kitchen range, found Ashe at his shoulder.

"Get out!" he ordered sternly. "You'll break your back!"

"I won't! Get out yourself and give a man a chance!"

They grinned at each other and heaved together, and young Stanley on the other end protested—

"Easy, there!"

A hand plucked at John out of the darkness, and he turned to see Sept, hatless in the downpour.

"Myers?"

The question startled John, then he laughed.

"He's busy keeping dry, Sept."

The shovel man shook his head and John remembered that Sept had been right before.

"I saw him making off up the road about ten minutes ago."

Sept seemed relieved and went back to work, but John noticed later that he was keeping a sharp lookout.

When everything, from the blacksmith's forge to the cook's pet can-opener, had been moved beyond the immediate danger, it must be all again moved to the cliff top and tents set up and bunks rebuilt and the thousand details of settling a new camp attended to. And it must be done right now. No man entertained the slightest question over that. Heaven alone knew what the storm would do to their work. Hours, even minutes might count before the end. They couldn't afford any working daylight for making camp.

Some time before dawn the rain stopped. The work was going forward rapidly. The men had got the cook's stove placed and he rewarded them with hot coffee, which cheered them immensely.

John now took time for a look at the road, feeling his way down in the darkness. There had been no sound of a slide, but that signified nothing. A twenty foot slip would put them nearly hopelessly behind. The slip at camp might not have portended anything serious. On the other hand it might have meant destruction.

He worked his way down through the mud, relieved to find that as yet nothing was seriously wrong. A few big stones had rolled into the road and the soft bed was badly gullied, but those were minor matters.

He stumbled and almost fell over something which he knew at once was not a stone. He stooped quickly and found a man lying in the mud—lying very still.

JOHN had brought no light with him. But he knew instantly, from some inner reservoir of knowledge, that the man he lifted was Sept; and his heart knotted in a sudden twist of pain.

With one swift heave he had the heavy burden across his shoulder and was turned toward camp, stumbling and slipping in the mud. Ashe's voice spoke out of the blackness.

"John?"

"Yes. What are you—"

"How is everything?"

"I have Sept here, unconscious. Let's try to get into my tent without being seen."

They succeeded, after a little maneuvering, and hastily applied restoratives. John had borrowed a lantern, and watched anxiously as Sept rolled to his side, groaned and opened his eyes. He did not respond to John's relieved smile. His face was suddenly convulsed with fear and he fought to make his stiff tongue move. At last he was able to whisper brokenly:

"Myers! Go quick, John! I had—him! But—stone. Go!"

Ashe did not know when John left the tent. He looked up and the contractor was gone. Ashe turned back to meet the eyes of the shovel man, now dimming as unconsciousness once more engulfed him. Ashe bathed carefully a great blue bruise on his head.

John didn't lose much time getting back down the rock strewn road. His thoughts had flashed instantly to Cartress' wall. If only he were not too late!

He saw a flicker of light, lost it, caught it again, and a moment later recognized the ominous sputter of a fuse. It appeared to be at the top of the new built wall.

John leaped up the hillside. Something hit him, head on, grabbed, cursed, tried to tear loose. John's hand closed just as a dull boom reached him. The man in his clutch scrambled madly for the upper ground and John scrambled with him, keeping a vicelike grip on his arm.

The mountainside slid, stopped, slipped a little farther, and seemed to settle down with a sigh.

John paused and his captive struck at him with all the fury of a cornered beast. John caught the wrist halfway and nearly crushed it. He did not utter a sound.

The man swore savagely and started

kicking. John put pressure on the wrist again, and the kicking stopped.

The sky was lightening and they looked at each other in the dimness. Secretly, Myers wondered why John didn't try to kill him.

"Too easy," John was thinking, "much too easy. What shall I do with him?"

His silence, his white imperturbability, was having the effect of hypnosis upon Myers. The man stood helpless in the terrible grip, feeling his strength ooze from him. He scarcely resisted when John at length released one hand and led him down to the road and along it to where the mud and rocks had poured through the broken wall, filling the roadway to the brink of the cañon.

"You are to walk across that," said John quietly. "It is very steep, of course, and it's slippery, and it may start to slide again any minute. If you get across, you will do well to disappear—permanently, Mr. Myers."

Myers stared before him with horror. He could not speak.

"Quickly!" said John. "It grows light. Do you wish to be here when this crew learns what has happened?"

Myers moved then. He moved in an agony of caution, setting his feet with desperate care, and holding his arms out like a man on a tight rope. John watched him as the light grew.

Halfway across Myers had to stop. Afraid to look up or to the side, he had come against a huge boulder, held precariously in the slippery face of the avalanche. Now he must take his bearings, and it almost finished him. For an upward glance showed him that he dared not try to go above the boulder, and a downward glance gave him a glimpse of the abyss of Tartary Creek.

But below the rock he must go, closer to that terrifying edge beyond which there was only space. He went on hands and knees and, as he negotiated the base of the rock, he sank closer still to the surface, wriggling abjectly through the mud.

The sight sickened John a little, so completely had terror mastered the man, so utterly had he lost all human dignity.

At last he reached safety, and disappeared without one backward glance.

DAYLIGHT had fully come. Beyond the slight curve above him John heard voices. The men had come down to learn the worst.

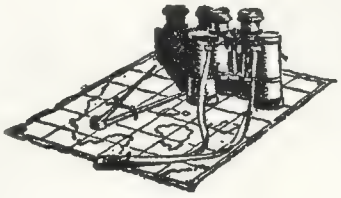
They saw their boss step from behind a boulder in the middle of the road and stand with a hand against it, facing them. Cartress was exclaiming aloud in furious unbelief. His wall couldn't possibly have gone out like that! By every holy saint in the calendar, it could not!

Then the talk died down as the crew felt something significant in the manner of the man below them. John was looking them in the eyes, one by one. Gradually they got it. He was asking them a question, putting it up to them.

There was no delay in their response. Sagging shoulders straightened; faces gray with weariness summoned a smile; sunken eyes gleamed.

Young Stanley, a disreputable figure with a broad streak of soot from temple to jaw and a muddy cap over one ear, waved a declamatory arm. The soggy chunk of bread in his fist took nothing from his ringing voice and challenging grin.

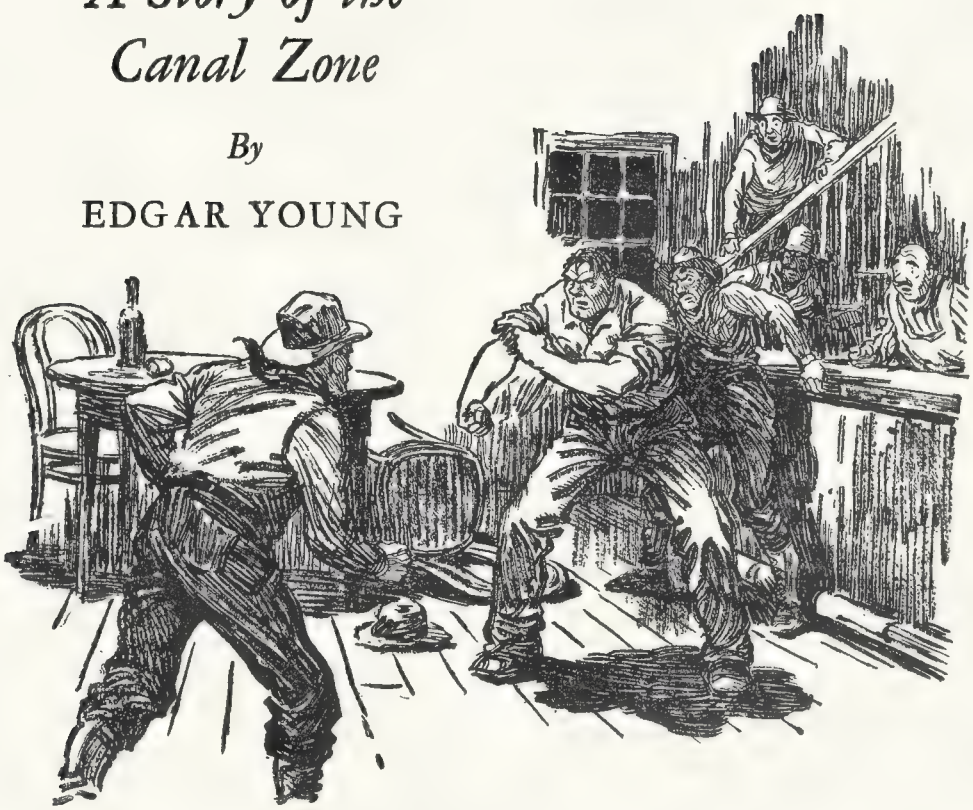
"Are we licked? No, by God!"



A Story of the Canal Zone

By

EDGAR YOUNG



PARDNERS

"AW HELL, Red, there ain't no use gitting all worked up about it now," admonished big Dale Burk as their tiny sloop lost way and slid in alongside the Colon pier.

Little Red Haley's pinched face worked with rage and his gray green eyes blazed.

"You go plumb to hell!" he retorted, squaring his spare shoulders aggressively.

Dale grinned tolerantly.

"Aw, be reasonable, Red," he chided.

Red's thin hands clenched and unclenched at his sides. His fierce eyes met the good natured ones of his partner for a moment and the pucker between his white eyebrows drew into a harder knot. A glance back over his shoulder showed the nearing pier. He turned and picked up the painter and sprang to the rail. He heard big Dale chuckle softly as he leaped across the gap of water that separated the sloop's rail from the rickety pier.

He hauled the light vessel inward toward the pier, nosing the bobbing *cayukas* out of the way. He looked back over his shoulder and saw Dale lumber on to the wharf with the stern line and loop it clumsily around the bitts of a rusty mooring cleat, then he threaded the painter neatly and quickly into the corroded mooring ring and yanked taut.

He climbed back aboard the sloop and

snarled as he ran his eyes over the few bags and bales of trade stuff they had bartered in on the trip. He snatched a bag of ivory nuts from the deck and dragging it by the ears, walked backward to the rail and tossed it across to the wharf.

Dale Burk still stood idly by on the wharf, staring moodily across at the row of awning fronted buildings facing out on Front Street. Every other one of the buildings was a saloon of some sort, with the spaces in between filled with nondescript stores, run by greasy Turks, smelly Chinese and the suave natives who were able to exist among the rabble. West Indian negroes, natives and off-shift canal workers leaned here and there against the walls in the humid shade beneath the awnings.

Red unloaded another sack and paused with his hands clutching tensely at the rail. He glared across at Dale, who still surveyed the sleepy looking street.

"Well, what about it, you big sloth? Are you goin' to help unload or have I got it all to do? I say it's one hell of a note!"

"Aw, Red, thunderation! Don't take on so in this danged heat!" Dale expostulated as he shuffled to the rail and clambered aboard the sloop. The remainder of the small cargo soon thudded on to the wharf.

"By golly, Dale! This mess is all your fault anyway!" Red blurted.

Dale lounged over and patted him quietly on his sweaty shoulder.

"I know we've had a poor trip, Red, a durned poor one too. We hain't made our salt. But cagin' and rarin' about it ain't goin' to help, now, so what's the use?"

Red squirmed loose from Dale's ham-like hand and whirled about to face the clumsy giant who seemed to him to be only trying to taunt him.

"I ain't ravin' about it, you overgrown mountain of mule meat! Can't a feller say nuthin' a-tall round you no more? Has a feller got to stand bein' bullied all the time just because you're a bigger man? You're naggin' and hecklin' at me all the time, and I just ain't goin' to stand no more of it off'n you. Now lay off it, I say, or else hell's just goin' to bust right wide open in the middle and leave you floppin' in it."

Dale shrugged his huge shoulders and yawned.

"Red, I ain't said nary a word to you. You've been rarin' up at me ever since we left Honey Shark Point and I've took a lot more from you this trip than I'm used to takin' and that ain't no maybe, nuther. I've been layin' your cussedness to you bein' sore about our poor luck. These tropical suns work hard on you redheaded fellers sometimes and kinda makes you nervous. Me, I burn brown; but it rips you light complected fellers wide open."

His tolerant grin strayed from the peeling face and scaly ears of the little man to the rents in his shirt and trousers where the seared flesh showed red. His eyes rested for a moment on Red's swollen bare insteps above the rope sandals. Red's expression had not changed when Dale's glance again strayed upward and their eyes met.

"'JEST supposin' now that things was reversed, Red? Eh? You member right well I told ye to leave them San Blas gals alone. Why didn't you do it? Old Chief Carlos made us drag it out o' there jest barely savin' our hides and taller. We've brung back our load of jews'-harps, tin clocks, machetes, calico and overall pants, and that's somethin'. We'd 'a' cleaned up down thar too. First traders to git in the real San Blas country too. But I ain't bellyachin' none a-tall. Hain't said a single word yet. But I'm goin' to tell you now, you've come mighty nigh to rilin' me a few times. I've been a-overlookin' it, Red, right along. So now whyn't you be reasonable and act somethin' like white men are sposed to?"

"You're jest a damned infernal liar!" grated Red, and Dale's ox eyes narrowed a trifle.

"Don't go an' act jest like a baby, Red!" chided Dale.

The wiry little man leaped in like a cat and lashed upward at the broad face above him. His clenched right fist smacked under Dale's broad jaw and the other followed in a split second. Screaming curses, he crowded the larger man backward across the slippery deck. All his bitterness stored up during the weltering months, all his physical inferiority, all that his raw nerves had suffered from the hot sun and stinging insects, this and more he was expressing in the rain of spatting blows.

Dale braced his foot against the mast to stop his backward rush and seized Red's wrists and held them.

"Damn it, Red, cut it out now! I've got enough of these monkey shines of yourn!" he snarled.

Red wrenched his right hand free and his fist bounced off Dale's forehead.

Then Dale sprang in with a bellow, and right and left he pounded Red backward and down.

The sleepy loungers from across the street, wakened by the struggle, drifted down to the wharf and stopped at the side of the sloop.

"Why'n'ell don't ye take on somepin' yer own size?" some one called.

"Bli' me, he's killin' the little runt!" another offered.

But Dale heard nothing, saw nothing, except the contorted red face with the baleful gray green eyes he was fast beating to a frothy pulp. He battered Red to his knees and then reached over and raised him to his feet again and felled him like a poleaxed ox.

A blear eyed, bloat bellied fellow, wearing a white apron, leaped across the rail and seized Dale by the right arm. Another followed and wrapped his arms around Dale's waist from the rear as two more sprang to Red's side and lifted him to his tottering feet.

Red tried frantically to free himself from them, cursing, screaming, threatening them with all he would do to them when he did succeed in freeing himself, but they hustled him over the rail and on to the wharf. The bartender released Dale's arm as the other man unwound his long arms from about his waist. Then they backed away from Dale's menacing step and followed the others across the rail and to the street.

Halfway to the shore Red turned and shook his fist back at Dale.

"You damn' big bum! Next time I'll finish you!" he shrilled.

"Gwan, you 'fernal little shrimp, I'll pulverize you if you've ever got the guts to show up around me again!" Dale roared back at him.

He watched them while they crossed the Panama Railroad track and trooped into Baldy's saloon. He could see them dimly through the window as they lined up before the greasy bar. A few minutes later two of the men came back out of the saloon and stopped to stare over at him before they separated and walked away. Other men straggled out of the place only to be replaced by thirsty customers who went in to take their places.

THE SUN dropped swiftly down into the Caribbean, and darkness fell suddenly without a warning twilight. Front Street woke up, and all along its length bright lights pierced the darkness. A train from the Canal Zone roared in and disgorged its load of Canal workers, in from along the line for an evening's amusement. Others wandered across from Cristobal to join friends from farther up the line. Sounds of blaring music and ribald singing shrilled out from the dark depths of Bottle Alley back of Front Street.

Dale Burk still stood on the deck of the little sloop, staring over at Baldy's door. Hundreds of men passed and repassed along the sidewalk but he was sure Red had not come out of the saloon yet.

"Stays in where the crowd'll protect him," he mumbled. "I'll beat the cussed little shrimp within an inch of his wuthless life if I ever catch him again."

He ran his hand over the knobs on his face where Red's fists had landed.

"I'll git a chance fer a few pokes at him before the gang interferes," he mused aloud as he shuffled to the rail and vaulted across.

He walked along the pier with hunched shoulders and crunched through the sand to the street and crossed it to the sidewalk. He walked along to Baldy's door and stood for a few moments peering within. The place was packed. He worked his way to the bar and called for a glass of beer.

While he drank the hot mess he peered into the big mirror back of the bar, taking in the crowd that filled through the place behind him. He gave a muffled grunt as he picked out Red sitting on a stool in a far back corner of the room looking in on a poker game. He set down his half emptied glass and began pushing his way through the crowd in that direction.

Halfway back a man lurched away from the bar and collided heavily with him. A voice cackled loudly as Dale stepped back to clear the man. The fellow only reeled into him again and this time the intent was plain.

"Spit on the son of a gun and drown him, Jumbo!" somebody advised.

The big fellow who had reeled into Dale was Jumbo, the fighting blacksmith from Gatun. He always picked a fight with some one when he was in Colon and drinking.

"Watch yer step, big boy, 'fore'n ye git yer foot into somethin'!" Dale warned him as he stepped away to avoid the second collision.

With his bullet head thrust belligerently forward Jumbo looked Dale over with piglike eyes that gleamed malevolently. Jumbo was the biggest man on the Zone and the hardest to handle. He weighed three hundred and five pounds, all bulk and no fat. He worked daily at the forge at Gatun and his muscles were as hard as the heavy iron he manipulated as readily as the ordinary man could handle wood.

Dale wondered why Jumbo was picking on him.

"I ain't bothered you none, Jumbo; better lay offen me too!"

He saw Jumbo's heavy fist start from his side and move upward in an arc. He moved his head barely in time to avoid the heavy blow that would have felled him had it landed. He felt the wind from Jumbo's brawny fist as it swept by his cheek. Jumbo partly passed him as the momentum of his swing carried him forward. Dale stepped a little farther to the right and as the big bulk of a man careened opposite him he chopped his right fist squarely against Jumbo's heavy jowl.

Jumbo only shook his touseled head, wheeled in his tracks and chopped back at Dale with a vicious left that made him cough as it landed full on his chest.

EVERYBODY in the packed room jammed into a circle about the two. The bartenders left their spigots and climbed on top of the bar where they stood on their knees and watched over the heads of the crowd.

Jumbo yanked off his coat and tossed it behind him. He hitched up his sweaty khaki pants and stepped forward again.

"Now I gits me a mess o' you!" he threatened.

Dale did not reply with words but reached out with another long right that landed on Jumbo's flat, spongy nose and the claret began to flow. Jumbo shook the sweat from his beady eyes and his own flailing right landed on the trader's temple and he fell sprawling. Dale scrambled to his feet as Jumbo charged. Coming upward inside of Jumbo's mauling arms, he landed right and left uppercuts.

As Dale leaped away Jumbo came down on his back with an open handed smack that thwacked loudly and brought laughs from the bystanders. Dale wove back in and thudded a right jolt to Jumbo's flattened nose. Jumbo went for him with arms moving back and forth like pistons of a locomotive. Dale was forced backward until he brought up sharply against the packed circle of by-

standers. He ducked low to evade a vicious side handed chop at his neck.

"Fight square, you damned polecat!" he advised in a nervous snarl as he bobbed erect.

His right fist plopped into one of Jumbo's bulging eyes. The big blacksmith roared like an elephant as he rushed.

Toe to toe, the big trader and the Cyclopean blacksmith exchanged battering blows, neither giving back an inch.

"Goramighty, look at them two wampuses fight, will yer just!" one of the ringside spectators exulted.

Dale's heavy right rocked the blacksmith's head and a left uppercut starting from the trader's knees smacked underneath the jutting chin of the giant. A nasty right in his one good eye caused him to flinch backward. Then, bellowing with pain, he ducked his head between his shoulders and charged like a maddened bull.

Dale was forced backward foot by foot, ducking and weaving to avoid the flailing fists. Some one thrust out a foot and he tripped backward over it. Jumbo clutched for Dale's collar and, seizing it, partly raised him to his feet. Thrusting out a stumpy leg he yanked Dale off his balance and hurled him to the floor flat on his back. As Dale struggled to arise Jumbo leaped in on him with his heavy, thick soled shoes. Up and down, three times he sprang as Dale writhed in pain.

RED HALEY had been watching the terrific battle from the front of the circle and as he saw Jumbo give Dale "the boots" his mouth flew open and his eyes dilated to twice their normal size. As Jumbo came down with a crunch the third time Red sprang in and grabbed the waistband of the sweaty khaki pants. He leaned far backward and grimaced with effort as he tugged the big blacksmith off Dale.

"Damn yer ornery soul, Jumbo, don't stomp a man that's down. I only told yer to lick him a little and not to kill 'im!"

Jumbo swept Red away from him with a backward swipe of his arm, but in the few seconds it had taken to get loose from Red the prostrate man had struggled to his feet as the little man spun across the ring and melted into the onlookers.

Dale tore into Jumbo. He was berserk now. Right, left. Right, left. Poke. Smash. Hook. Uppercut and chop. The entire room shook as the blows landed. Jumbo was still flailing out, but there was a bloody mist floating before his eyes. Pink froth foamed from his mouth. He began to reel as Dale crashed every blow he had ever learned into his sodden flesh. He sank to his knees and dropped backward to a sitting posture, giving vent to a blubbering groan of pain and fear.

Dale stood over him, breathing heavily, himself unsteady, hurt, winded, gaping down at Jumbo with bulging eyes.

Red Haley leaped out from the crowd and plucked at his sleeve. The piping voice of the little man cleared his brain and he turned his head and grinned down at him with battered lips that oozed blood.

"Hell, you've whipped Jumbo!" Red exulted.

"He shore Gawd did!" blurted a voice in the crowd and a roar of applauding shouts shook the room.

Red began to tug Dale through the crowd toward the open door and the crowd melted aside in humble deference to let them through. The outer air felt cool after the steamy heat of the packed room. The two traders headed across the street. Dale was grinning as he listened to Red's prattle.

"By gawnies, you cleaned up on Jumbo, Dale. Mauled hell's daylights outen the fightenest man on the whole Zone!"

Their sandaled feet padded along the rickety wharf.

"Didn't you leave Jumbo a sight!" Red insisted.

They scrambled over the rail to the deck of the sloop. In the dim light which came to them from the windows of Front Street they unrolled and slung their hammocks.

"My cigs and matches is all sweated to a pulp, Red. You got some dry uns?"

"I hope to tell you!"

A match flared. Two points of red glowed as the two men sprawled at ease in the flimsy hammocks.

"Fellers like me and you has just got to stick t'gether," babbled Red drowsily.

"We shore'n hell have, Red," growled Dale. "Hadn't been fer you old Jumbo'd just plumb stomped the tar outen me. I shore appreciate your steppin' in, Red."

"Aw that wasn't nuthin' a-tall to do," denied Red modestly.

Up overhead a crescent moon dived in and out through streamy wisps of cloud that spread across an indigo sky. The gentle trade wind puffed at a wisp of tattered sail that flapped as the sloop rolled to the toss of the Caribbean beneath her. The lights of Colon blinked out and vanished one by one. The last train of the night filled and departed for the Zone towns. In the smoking car of this train Jumbo, the blacksmith, sat nursing his bruised head in his stiffened hands and pretending not to hear the various remarks that were voiced for his edification. Jumbo was thinking and it was quite an ordeal. He finally voiced it aloud—

"Damned little runts is just like wimmen; help one outen a beatin' and they'll claw yer eyes outen yer face."

Having delivered this bit of drunken philosophy, Jumbo fell asleep and was snoring loudly when the conductor shook him awake at Empire, twenty miles beyond Gatun.

A TUCKET

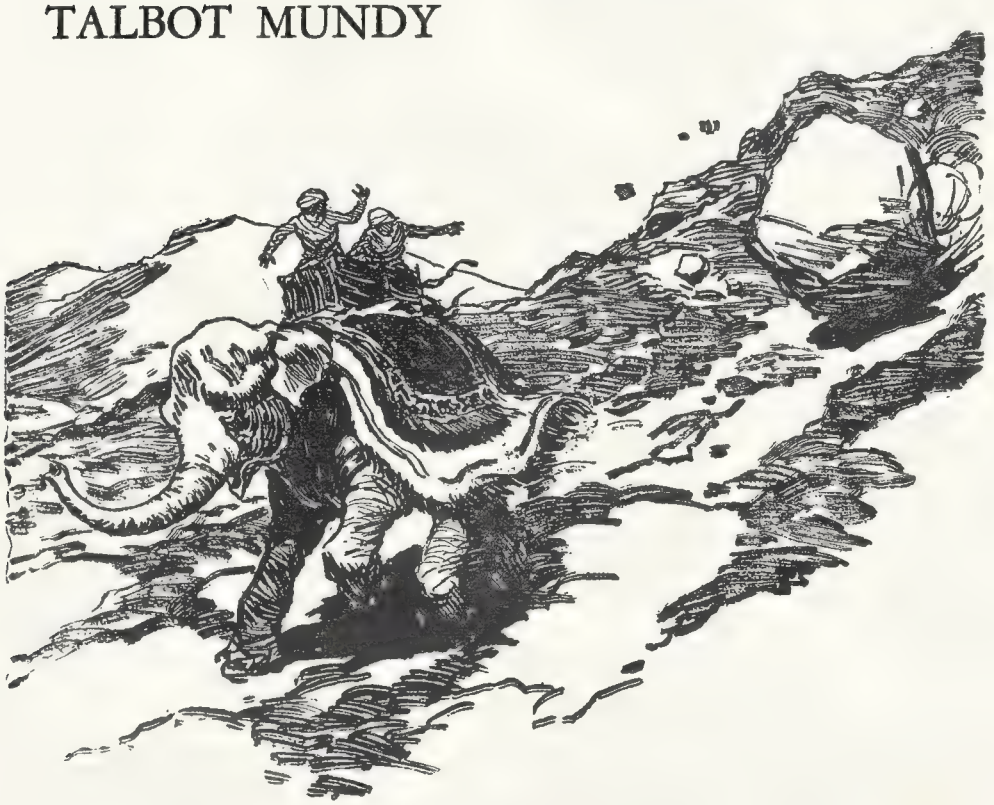
A Novelette of Ben Quorn and the Red Headed Bandit of the India Hills

By

TALBOT MUNDY

THE PALACE grounds were a half square mile of wooded darkness and lamplit marble within a high wall, against which the wind and rain drove in furious gusts. Except for the sound of the rain against it, the wall had to be guessed; but where the lamplight shone above the guardhouse there was a glimpse of water streaming from the overhanging eaves, and of a dim, irregular segment of wall upon either hand. A puddle beneath the lamp shone like a pool of liquid fire.

It was Indian night. No sound except that swish of rain against the wall and the sighing of wind swept trees. There was nothing to make the guardhouse gate



of DRUMS

seem real, or to make the sounds seem other than the formless, melancholy welter of chaos, until a tucket of drums sobbed from the point where the long wall dissolved into the darkness. Then the splash of shod feet. Then, in a lull between the blasts of wind, the clink of it might be rifle swivels, or spurs, or both. But no lantern to show who was coming. Only the splash now and then of shod feet in step, and the sodden thump of three wet sheepskin drums. But that brought a world into being. It suggested purpose. It redeemed the dismal night.

Three drummers, then an elephant with two men on his back, who looked like something from another world, with overcoat collars up over their ears and bare legs wet and glistening; then an officer, spurred and sabered, splashing gamely through the mud and struggling to hold a cheap umbrella against the wind; behind him an almost naked servant helping him to hold the umbrella; then eight sepoys, overcoated and trying to keep the rain out of their ancient rifle locks; and last of all, a small cart drawn by one humped bullock, driven by a nearly naked man who twisted the bullock's tail and kicked at the animal ceaselessly with his bare toes, passed in under the guard room archway. There were doors that faced each other under the arch. Two sentries, smothered in shawls and overcoats, awoke out of the doorway shadows, presented arms at each other because the procession had already passed them, retired again into the shadows and resumed their sleep.

On one side of the arch was the room in which distinguished visitors wrote their names in an ancient parchment book, in proof that they had called at the palace to parade their courtesy. Light through a hole in the blind sent a streak of mellow gold across the paving stones under the arch—a streak of warmth that made the gloom beyond look more impenetrable.

Within the room, with a cigar in his mouth and his feet on the table, sat Brazenose Blake. On the table were a whisky bottle, a siphon, a box of cigars and three tall glasses. Facing him sat Parbit Singh, the palace chamberlain, dressed in a blue serge European cut suit and dark blue turban, that emphasized the darkness of his eyes. He was a very handsome man, as perfectly at ease with Blake as with Quorn, the other member of the party. Quorn, who made no claim to anything other than his position as superintendent of the ranee's elephants, wore a crimson turban, and a pepper and salt suit.

"WHY A 'tucket' of drums?" asked Blake. "The word is obsolete and it means a flourish of trumpets."

"Well, there were no trumpets," said Parbit Singh. "They only had three drums but a tucket was ordered, so they did their best. They marched around the wall sounding a tucket about every fifty yards. The bandit heard them and took to his heels, believing a large force was coming. That was more than a hundred years ago, when we had an English mercenary officer commanding the state

troops. He gave all his orders in English because he was too drunken and lazy to do anything else, but he saved the palace from the bandits by giving that order. And tucket is an easy word to remember. So tucket it is. And ever since that night the march around the walls has been repeated. I don't think you should try to upset such harmless ancient customs as our tucket."

Blake laughed.

"I would as soon think of changing the custom of guarding Buckingham Palace. But here is the point, Parbit Singh. There is a bandit at large, and from all accounts he has a considerable following. If your young ranee is to continue to rule, she must subdue that bandit—capture him—bring him to justice and protect her subjects from anything like armed banditry in future. This tucket of drums may have served its purpose a hundred years ago, but isn't it rather ridiculous now, as a means of—"

"No," said Parbit Singh. He shook his head. "Not at all. You don't understand. We have only fifty soldiers, not counting officers. Those bandits realize our position and respect our difficulties. If we should discontinue that tucket they would say we were not showing them the proper respect. But as long as we continue it, as a sort of gesture of courtesy, they take no serious steps against a government which they recognize as necessary for the good of all concerned. Without orderly government, Mr. Blake, even banditry would cease to be profitable. They understand that. We also understand it. So we arrive at a working compromise."

"Unfortunately," said Blake, "your ranee's enemies have sent complaints to our state department. They say a man's life isn't safe outside the city."

Quorn interrupted:

"That's them rascally priests, sir. Them priests'd take the side of Satan himself against the ranee. Give them bandits justice and we'd pay 'em a bounty for killing off Brahmin priests."

Blake blew his nose behind a big silk handkerchief.

"But the roads should be safe, Quorn."

"Sir, they're safer than if there was a cop at every crossroads. Them bandits don't stand for competition. If you and me was to hold up somebody we'd have 'em down on us in fifteen minutes. The bandits cost much less than the priests. It's cheaper and easier to pay 'em a small fee for protection than it would be to bribe police. It only costs me ten rupees a month to protect all my grass cutters."

"—who cut grass for her Highness the ranee's elephants," said Blake. "That won't do, Quorn. You know it won't. This is not the Middle Ages."

"Well, sir, her Highness has fifty sepoys. Dope it out to suit yourself—only take a look first at the sepoys. Me and my mahouts could beat 'em easy with some pop-guns and a brass band."

Parbit Singh appeared more relieved than annoyed by that summary of the situation. As palace chamberlain he would hardly have cared to speak so plainly.

"Well," said Blake after a moment's silence, "the night is young and it's raining too hard to go home. We have this room to ourselves. Let's try to solve the riddle. What is the bandit leader's name?"

"Nobody knows his real name. He is known as Bagh—and Bagh means tiger," said Parbit Singh. "He came to Narada many years ago from nobody knows where and he has lived in our mountains ever since. He limps a little, but has enormously strong shoulders and arms. He is said to be able to leap into a tree out of the saddle and to escape through the forest like a monkey. But that may be exaggeration."

"Are his men afraid of him, or do they like him?" Blake asked.

"Both."

"That's bad," said Blake. "Fear and affection is the Napoleonic combination. Where does he bank his money? There must be some one in the city who transacts business for him."

"Nobody knows," said Parbit Singh.

"Nonsense," Blake retorted. "A bandit without influential friends is an impossibility. He couldn't last ten days. He couldn't cash his loot to pay his men. He couldn't get warning of ambush. He couldn't keep himself informed as to the political situation. He couldn't issue his own propaganda. He would be at the mercy of the first policeman with a pair of handcuffs and a club. Name me his agent in the city and I will show you how to catch your bandit without much trouble."

"But we have no proof," said Parbit Singh—so lamely that Blake stared.

"Well," he answered after a moment, "I don't want to have to ask for British troops."

THE RAIN swished and splashed torrentially. A cloud of smoke blew out into the room and everybody coughed.

Blake was about to speak again when a door creaked beside the fireplace. For a moment he thought the storm caused it, but he glanced at the door and saw a hand was holding it open. He had supposed the door concealed a closet, but a strong draught swirled through, suggesting a passage leading into the palace grounds.

"Eavesdroppers," he remarked unpleasantly. "Come in, whoever you are."

There were several men in the passage, for he heard feet shuffling. However, only one man came in and he closed the door behind him. Parbit Singh muttered an exclamation and Quorn grinned. Blake sat bolt upright, bringing his feet to the floor with a crash, nearly upsetting the whisky as he jerked his chair around to face the stranger, whose manner was a blend of careless self-confidence and half mocking deference.

"Good evening," he said in English.

Vaguely, with his shock of beeswax colored hair, he resembled an orang-outang. He had enormous shoulders and a pair of arms that nearly reached his knees. His pug nose had been flattened at some time, and unskillfully restored. His face was framed by tangled red whiskers and tanned by the weather, his teeth were clean and extremely regular, and his mouth was sensitively humorous. Altogether, he was not displeasing. He wore no head covering. From the waist down he was dressed native style in dripping wet cotton pantaloons, with naked feet. He had evidently left his sandals outside the door. From the waist up he had made some attempt at European costume. He wore a coat and vest of brown velvet with brass buttons over a bright green silk shirt. At his hip was a pistol holster and he wore a belt full of ammunition.

"Good evening," he said again, since no one answered. "I am Bagh. You have heard of me?" He looked at Blake, and humor shone in his greenish gray eyes. "No," he went on, "there is no use trying to summon the guard. My men have locked the guardhouse door. See—I have the key here."

He tapped the monstrous iron thing on the table.

"Shall I sit down? *Krishna!* But I would try to show better manners if you were visiting me in my village."

"Oh, so you have a village? Yes," said Blake, "sit down by all means. Give him a chair, Quorn, won't you?"

But the stranger had already taken one and was holding his legs to the fire to draw the rain steaming from his pantaloons.

"It was reported to me," he said, looking at Blake over his shoulder, "that you told the ranee that you meant to have some unofficial conversations with a view to solving the bandit problem for her. I'm the bandit. Let's talk. Where did I learn English? In England, since you wish to know. I was born in Surrey. I tried clerking in a bank, then prize fighting, because I had heard that Corbett did that, but my punch was not so good as my nerve. I tried the army, but they wouldn't have me because my chest is out of all proportion to my waist—or some such nonsense. So I came to India as a

fireman on a Belgian tramp, deserted, led the holy life for two or three years begging by the wayside, tried after that to get a job as railway guard, but was kicked on the hip by a Eurasian for getting in his way. He died a trifle suddenly. I took to the holy man life again until I reached this place, where the bandit business looked too good to pass up. It was. I like it. It's more respectable than banking and less exhausting than being punched by experts. There's no big money in it and I miss seeing the newspapers, but it's a fairly lazy life and I get all the comforts I need. Now tell me who you are."

"The man who is going to put you out of business," Blake assured him.

"Yes, I left you a pretty wide opening there, didn't I. However, now that the referee has counted me out and you have had all the applause, suppose you tell me who you really are. Are you one of the Blakes of Blakewood? Oh. Not Marmaduke Brazenose Blake, by any chance—captain of the Surrey eleven twenty years ago? Oh, well. My uncle strung and pegged your cricket bats. Remember that time when you fought the cattle drover in Kingston Marketplace—the man who beat his dog to death? I saw that. I was one of three who swore to the police that your name was Jones and that you lived at Elm Road Surbiton. You owe me a lie in return."

"I am told that you caught a man recently and skinned him alive," said Blake disgustedly.

"That will do for the lie. The account stands even. You referred, I suppose, to the money lender. He should have been skinned, but he wasn't. I let him buy his choice of all the ways of dying. He could have been skinned alive for ten rupees. The easy ways, of course, are the expensive ones. He chose to die a natural death—he has the dropsy anyhow—and that's costing him more per month than I though he had per annum. The climate appears to suit him up there in the mountains and I rather think he likes the separation from his wife."

"Well," said Blake, "your banditry has got to cease."

"That's what I came to discuss. May I have some whisky?"

Blake nodded. Quorn poured him a stiff drink. Blake pushed the box of cigars toward him.

"Excellent, I dare say, but I'm not a judge of whisky," said Bagh. "For too many years I have had to drink and smoke what I could get. You know what that means. No sense of taste or smell left. However, I hear perfectly. Before I came in at your invitation, I heard you say something about British troops. I suppose you mean a regiment of Sikhs or some other blackguards who will rape the whole countryside and force me to carry out reprisals. I hope you won't think of it. It wouldn't be like a Blake of Blakestone to try to solve a riddle that way. Any cad could do that."

Blake scowled. Nearly all Englishmen do when they are struggling against their naturally friendly instincts.

"But somebody was skinned alive," he insisted.

"Oh, yes. One of my men was. We caught him stealing from the money lender—which was the same thing as robbing us, of course."

"So you skinned him alive, eh?"

"Not unless you're talking in terms of occult philosophy. We didn't even hang him. We drove him away to try to live with honest men. Cruel, I admit, but life is that way. He was caught by the police, who shot him. I suppose he knew too much about them. After that they skinned him in order to make out a case against me. The body was no longer recognizable, so they said it was the money lender's. According to Karma, I suppose I skinned that fellow. But as one man to another, you might say I have an alibi."

"If you're telling the truth."

"I always do. It's so safe. It gets you a reputation for sagacity and cunning that is worth a thousand men, and gives you much less trouble than the men would. Let me tell you some more truth."

"Fill your glass first," Blake suggested.

"No, thanks. If that whisky's as strong as I suspect, I might get altogether too gentlemanly. I don't think you would take advantage of me, but I suspect the palace chamberlain. I have done him so many favors that he might welcome the chance to turn against me."

PARBIT SINGH looked scandalized. He had far too perfect manners to defend himself. He appeared pained, yet cognizant of the fact that life is full of slander and false evidence. Quorn nodded unconsciously; it appeared he also had his views. But the bandit sensed the situation and proceeded at once to complicate it by explaining:

"You see, he owes his job to me. I keep the ranee on the throne. The priests are against her because she defies tradition and most of the laws of caste. The priests are great talkers, and some people are good listeners. The less prosperous ones can listen with three ears. Consequently there are at least ten thousand people in Narada who would like to start a revolution and bring in the British. The ranee's fifty soldiers can't prevent them. But I can.

"I inform them that at the first sign of a revolt against the ranee, I will loot the temples, the shops and the banks; furthermore, that I will fight the British troops and spread havoc all over the countryside. I point out to them that I cost much less than a standing army, and almost infinitely less than an invasion by the British troops."

"Nevertheless," said Blake, "this banditry has got to cease. This is an unofficial conversation. I would appreciate your suggestions as to how the problem can be solved. You understand, don't you? At a word from me our government would send sufficient troops to wipe you and your followers off the slate."

"It would take a hundred thousand men, or else several years," Bagh answered. "Even with poison gas and airplanes. Have you any idea how difficult this country is to penetrate with troops? How easy it is for me to hide? How much damage I could do? How easy it is for me to get what few supplies I need? How thoroughly I would enjoy the sport of playing even a losing game against the whole bally British Empire? And besides, there's politics to think of. You see, I'm educated, although I admit I don't see the newspapers very often. I think I know enough to stir the patriotic stink in the noses of sensitive men and women. I think I could set about a fifth of India, say, two fifths of the House of Commons, all Europe and half the United States howling about imperialism and capitalistic greed. If you don't believe it, try me. Maybe I'm wrong. I'm no Lenin—no Trotsky—no Mussolini. I'm new to that wholesale heads-I-win-and-tails-you-lose stuff. It rather scares me. Too many scruples, I suppose. But I will stake my scruples against yours. Summon the troops and I'll cut loose. On the other hand, play on-side and I'll obey the rules too. I think now I'll change my mind and have just one more whisky—not too much soda, Mr. Quorn. When! That's perfect, thank you."

"What do you think of it?" Blake asked suddenly, staring at Parbit Singh.

"I think he has put the situation in a nutshell. On the one hand, he keeps excellent order on the countryside and the roads are safe to any one who pays a little tribute. They are safe to the poor at all times. On the other, it is not compatible with dignity or economically sound, according to the text books, to allow a bandit to do the police work. Others might take example from him. There might soon be no government if this were allowed to continue."

"I agree with that," said Blake. "Now what about it?"

He stared at the bandit truculently. Bagh ran his fingers through his beeswax colored hair and grinned.

"Play fair," he said. "It's your turn. I've talked enough. I suspect, if I had

one more whisky, I would tell you my right name."

"I shall have to inform myself," said Blake, "as to how many men you have and just how strong your position really is."

"Good. I like that. Almost any other diplomat would have tried to disguise the fact that my strength or weakness makes all the difference."

"It makes some difference," said Blake. "I prefer to know how many troops to ask for."

"I would have liked you even better," said the bandit, "if you had admitted that your government particularly does not want to send troops. There's nothing like telling the truth. Oh, yes, I know they *could* send them. But I happen to know that your instructions are to keep peace if possible."

"I'd like to know where you had that misinformation," Blake retorted. He glared at Parbit Singh, who looked like a man who knows the world is full of false accusers, but that innocence will justify itself in God's good time.

The bandit grinned again.

"Well," he said, "I grant you full protection and free passage for yourself and a few servants to visit me at my headquarters. You see anything you want to see, only don't bring any soldiers or policemen. I will provide the bodyguards. It's beastly weather. You will find horses can't manage the mud. Better come on an elephant. If you'd care to shoot a tiger bring your rifle. I can't offer you any decent whisky or cigars, so bring your own. And by the way, have you any old newspapers? I got a copy of the *Times* three months ago. I almost know the advertisements by heart."

"I'll bring a pile of them," Blake answered.

"Thanks," said Bagh. He stood up. "Care to shake hands?"

"No, not yet," Blake answered. "I hope to be glad to shake hands with you before we've finished."

"Well—if I give you the key of the guard room, will you promise not to let those soldiers out until ten minutes after I've gone? Now and then they shoot straight by accident. They mean all right. It's a pity to have to *strafe* them."

"Very well," said Blake, "I promise. Ten minutes by my watch."

THE BANDIT went out by the same door through which he had come, closing it silently behind him. There was only a glimpse of armed men in the passage. Thereafter, though Blake listened intently, there was not a sound. He was sure that they did not go out through the guard room arch.

"It's pretty obvious they've friends in the palace grounds," he said, and stared again at Parbit Singh, who said nothing. It was Quorn who spoke:

"Sir, they've friends everywhere since that man captained 'em. I doubt if you could find in all Narada fifty men who'd take the field against 'em. Some wouldn't dare. Some wouldn't care to. And every living man and woman would be tipping the bandits off to every move you made. The fifty that you might raise by paying 'em handsome would be tipping off hardest of all, for two reasons: first, the longer the campaign lasted the more money they'd get; and second, they wouldn't want to risk their skins. Barring all that the job might be easy."

Blake allowed fifteen minutes to elapse instead of ten, then he unlocked the guard room door. It was none of his business, but he suspected that if Parbit Singh had done it there might have been some sort of official hocus-pocus afterwards. There was no sense in making scapegoats of a few cold, sleepy sepoys. Blake was a trouble hunter, not a maker, and he liked to go deep into the hearts of things before he set surfaces ruffling.

He wished Parbit Singh a good night and, turning his overcoat over his ears, went splashing through the mud toward the great lonely bungalow where he had to live in state, representing the most perplexed, determined and inconsistent—

because alive, alert and constantly evolving—government in all the world. He had been chosen to go to Narada because he was daring and unconventional; but he would be chosen for the limbo of retirement on half pay if he should dare too much, or interfere too little.

"Abdul," he said, as his servant came struggling out of the night toward him holding an umbrella and a lantern, "no man can hold his pants up and succeed at anything. Take off your pants and carry them. Give me the lantern. Then you can do one job half decently. Yes, you may hold the umbrella yourself. I would rather be wet."

QUORN found his way to the elephant lines, where the great brutes were chained so that they could stand in the rain, or take shelter beneath brick arches as they wished. Most of them stood in the downpour, glistening like wet rocks when the flickering firelight overcame the smoke where the mahouts, who had run out of opium and could not sleep, were trying to warm themselves. Lately, Quorn had put a cot in the shed where the corn and medicines were kept, to cut down pilfering. That was the chief reason why the mahouts could buy no more opium until next pay day. One of them, splashing through the puddles, followed Quorn toward the shed door, where he watched him light the lamp and tuck the mosquito netting carefully under the mattress before turning in.

"Protector of the poor," he whined, when Quorn noticed him at last.

"Strut your stuff," Quorn answered, and then changed into the local dialect. "You know better than to ask favors unless you've earned 'em. Yes, I know, two opium pills would make me your father and your mother and the shadow of God upon earth. I've heard that several times. Yes, and you'll tell me something I ought to know. I've heard that—frequent. Whenever I pay you fellers in advance I get nothing but lies, so give me your news first. And mind you, I can kick like fifteen mules if that's my judgment, so save your breath if you've been cooking up a yarn over the fire there to get me to open the medicine chest. Also make it short and snappy, since it's long past bedtime."

"Heaven Born, there came a robber from the hills—a follower of that one whom they call Bagh, the Redhead. He besought corn for his horse, which your servant gave him, being chief mahout and knowing well your honor's generosity. No, sahib, it is true there was no key to the corn-bin, but there is a little loose plank where a rat gnawed and an arm can reach in—"

"Lord, but I'll get the better o' you heathen yet! So that's where all the corn's been going."

"Heaven Born, that robber may have been a liar, but your servant tells the truth. He said your honor will be asked to take two or three elephants into the hills, conveying Beelaik sahib and his servants; and that you must not be frightened because Bagh, the Redhead, has not forgotten how you let him hide in your house—"

"The man's a damned liar," said Quorn. "I never knew he was in the house or I'd have opened a bottle. I never knew he'd been there until I missed a couple o' newspapers. And I wouldn't ha' known then, only I started to whack my servant, so he came out with the truth. But go on with your story."

"That was all, sahib. You should not be frightened and you should follow the trail to the place where a tiger slew three charcoal burners."

"And you want opium pills for that? If it weren't such a raw wet night I'd take an ankus to you. Here you are—how many of you shivering by the fire there? Well, here's two each, and no holding out on the others—two for each of you, you thankless bums."

He put a lump of the stuff into his pocket and faced the rain again, splashing his way with a lantern to where the monster, Asoka stood, half under his arch and half out of it, catching the drip

from the eaves on his back. It was one of Quorn's obsessions that prolonged rain was as depressing to the elephant as to himself, and the beast was clever enough not to dissuade him.

"Here you are, you big stiff. This'll warm your insides."

He made the great beast get back under the arch, and swore because the mahouts had not provided enough gravel to prevent the dirt from being churned into a slough. Then, under the arch, he went through the regular routine of saying good night. There was a box on which he sat. There was a box of matches in a dark hole where a brick had been displaced. He lighted his pipe.

"You big bum. Ain't you 'shamed of all the trouble you got me into along o' being your friend? Just because I takes a fancy to you and tames one o' your tantrums, I has to assume responsibilities that'd drive a bishop crazy. And the more I spoils you the more you wish on me in the way o' circuses. It stands to reason, luck like me and you've been having can't last forever."

WHEN morning came, he was sure that prophecy was right. The blankets were damp and so was his tobacco. There were beads of water all over the walls of the shed he slept in. He could hear rain drumming on the roof; and the feet of the man who awakened him came splashing through a slippery lake of mud that would have depressed any one except worms and elephants. He opened the shed door and glared at a man with a gunny sack over his head. He listened in scandalized silence. He spat sarcastically.

"Sure," he answered, "my middle name is Noah. I'm the guy what swam Niagara Falls. I'm web footed. I've a twin six submarine sedan for just such social visits of a nice bright morning. Breakfast? No, sir, I don't eat it. Coffee? I'm like my elephants, I never heard of it. I'm one o' these here frogs that get fat on water. But say, you cut along home and tell her Highness Ben Quorn's coming, but he ain't going to wear no top hat nor no gilt plush suit. I'm coming in a gee string and umbrella, and if I manage to swim that distance and actually get there, she'll have to talk to me down the periscope."

What he actually did was to ride an elephant, so that he reached the palace a long way ahead of the messenger. And though his tweed suit was drenched and his turban was a wet red rag that dripped cheap dye all over his face, he was, as usual, so pleased to be received inside the palace, and so delighted by the prospect of intrigue, that his ill humor vanished. He was not kept waiting. The ranee and two of her ladies entered almost before he had had time to look into one of the mirrors and wipe the dye off his face with his handkerchief.

THE YOUNG ranee appeared weatherproof. She was as radiantly lovely and as mischievously merry as he had ever seen her. She wore no jewels whatever, but was just a charmingly dressed young girl, with flowers in her hair, obviously pleased to see a friend upon whom she knew she could rely for anything, in or out of reason. He refused to be seated for fear his wet clothes would spoil the furniture, but she sent for a cane chair and refused to reveal her business until he was comfortable, one leg crossed over the other, and the servant had left the room.

"Are you ready for an expedition, Mr. Quorn?" she asked then.

"Yes, miss. And you may as well tell me the worst first. I was telling Asoka last night, him and me's due for grief o' some sort."

"Last night? Where were you last night? Weren't you in the visitors' room at the gate house?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you met Bagh—the Redhead?"

"Yes, miss.

"Tell me in ten words what you thought of him?"

"One's enough, miss. He's scared."

She nodded.

"Was any one else scared?"

"Yes, miss. Parbit Singh was. Him and Bagh has been cahooting and maybe there's been some money changing hands. Parbit Singh kept a straight face, but he was scared stiff thinking the Redhead might give him away. And Bagh, he talked a sight too promiscuous about fighting the whole British Empire for him to kid me he wasn't bluffing. And if you was to ask me, I don't think he bluffed Mr. Blake worth ten cents."

The ranee frowned a moment, pondering. Possibly she was trying to scowl, but she could not keep her mouth from looking mischievous, or her eyes from shining happily.

"Well, Mr. Quorn, I am only a girl on a throne, and my throne seems to me to be dreadfully insecure. If it is left to the statesmen to prop it up, it will fall, undoubtedly. Can you think of a way to help me?"

"No, miss."

"Oh, I'm so relieved! I believe I could get along nicely if it weren't for being helped so often. Were you ever a bandit?"

"No, miss."

"Isn't that splendid. You would really believe them, wouldn't you, if they threatened most terrible things."

"Not me, miss. I've drove bandits in a taxicab. They was the scaredest guys I've ever seen. I was afraid the guy that held a gun against my ribs would loose it off because his teeth was chattering."

"Ah! I *knew* I could depend on you. You know, don't you, that nobody is really dangerous until he is afraid."

"Man or beast, miss."

"Even Mr. Brazenose Blake."

"Yes, miss. But he ain't so easy to frighten."

"I don't want him frightened. But I don't want him to frighten the bandits. Do you think you could bear that in mind if you should take Mr. Blake to see Bagh? Oh yes, I know all about that. He sent a man last night to tell me he invited Mr. Blake to come and see him. Bagh was afraid I might forbid it on the grounds of danger. He has brains. He wants to get the situation straightened out before the rains are over and it might be convenient for the British to send troops.'

"It'll be awful mean traveling through the jungle, miss, this weather. Skeeters and malaria—"

"Quinine," she answered. "Use lots of oil of eucalyptus, and I'll give you a new mosquito net to use at night. You won't enjoy it much, but when you come back I will buy you a new Ford car to drive around in, and you shall have a uniformed attendant to take care of it."

"Miss, I'd rather have the corn bin rebuilt. Them mahouts—"

"Very well, you shall have that done too. And I'll let you fire all the mahouts and hire new ones if you like."

"No, miss, thank you kindly. Them I have is bad enough. When do we start on this here expedition."

"Today, if possible. Not later than tomorrow. I learned that Mr. Blake was up before daybreak giving orders to his secretary and his servants. I expect a visit from him as soon as he thinks it's decent to come—he is the most considerate, informal man I ever knew. He is probably itching to go, but afraid to get me up too early in the morning.

"If he only knew how I am itching to see him started! But then, he wouldn't go at all, because he's a diplomat. The way to make him take the worst risks is to persuade him I am anxious about his safety. Do you think you could do that?"

"I could try, miss. He ain't credulous. He likes to let on he believes you. Being a decent feller, he'll go on pretending, so long as no harm comes of it. But he's awful wise under that easy going, gentlemanly manner. My way with him is to tell him just the plain plumb truth and not too much of it at any one time. Then let him throttle his own twin two. He's good at it."

"It would be terrible," she answered, "it would be disastrous if an accident should happen to Mr. Blake. That is why I wish you, and nobody but you, to take him. Do you understand me? I am

really anxious about Mr. Blake's safety."

Quorn scratched his head. He thought he understood but he was not quite sure. Perhaps she did not wish him to understand.

"I'll keep him out o' danger," he said looking at her slyly with his goatish, agate colored eyes. He resented half confidences.

"You will mind your own business!" she retorted angrily. She looked contemptuous, as if Quorn were untrustworthy after all.

"Don't you know that danger is the only element in which he thrives? He is one of those men who are no good, can't use their wits unless they are in danger. Danger arouses all his faculties; he becomes wise and does unexpected things. I don't want him frightened. And the only thing that can really frighten him is the thought that he is making a fool of himself. Whereas it is only when he is making a fool of himself that he is really any good. So he mustn't be frightened on any account. He must think he is in deadly danger, and that I am afraid for his safety. Then he will proceed to show me what a Duke of Wellington and Solomon he is by playing beautifully into my hands, and thinking it was he who saved my throne, when, as a matter of fact, I intend to get him promoted for being so stupid that even the statesmen think him wonderful."

"I get you, miss," said Quorn. "I get you. I'll manage my elephant perfect. Barring that, I don't know nothing excep' that quinine is good for skeeter bites, and tuck the net in good under the mattress afore you turn in. And now I'll go and get Asoka's back rubbed good and dry afore we put the howdah on him. I'll be ready to start, miss, whenever you give the word."

THE START was made that afternoon in a drumming rain. Two elephants, loaded with tents, supplies and servants, splashed behind Asoka, who was in holiday mood because the rain amused him. He was like a dog who delights to roll in unspeakable things. He wanted to stop and smear himself with mud; he wished to fill his trunk with water from the pools and squirt it at his passenger. He chose the slippery places where he could act like a skidding motor car and slide with all four feet together. At times he hurried for no reason, and then Quorn and Blake were drenched by the shower from overhanging branches. At other times he preferred to dawdle, breaking off branches which he alternately chewed and flourished. He pretended to smell tigers in the undergrowth—as if any self-respecting tiger would be out in such abominable weather—and simulated fear. And through it all, Quorn humored him with the patience of understanding.

"He's betwixt and between two memories, sir. What he was, and what he is. And he don't know jes' exactly what he'd like to be. There ain't no harm in him—and tomorrow he'll act like an old gent smoking a cigar."

That first night they camped in a clearing where there was a huge shed without sides, under which piles of firewood had been stacked. But the roof leaked, there were snakes in the wood, and the mosquitos were there in myriads, so that the storm outside was almost preferable.

Blake invited Quorn to sup with him and they sat together under the tent awning, where Quorn could watch the elephants eating their enormous rations of freshly cooked flat cakes.

"You appear to know where Bagh keeps himself," Blake hazarded.

"No, sir."

"Good Lord! Do you propose to wander about in the jungle until we stumble on him?"

"No, sir. I reckon it's up to him to find us. He knows we've started. I saw one of his men go running naked away ahead of us, soon as we pulled our freight away from your front door. Them heathen can run like rattlesnakes. I'll bet you it was Bagh who had that there firewood stacked ready for us. He's

prob'ly got relays of runners, and they'll signal to each other from tops o' trees and what not."

"Too bad a man with all his brains and energy should be an outlaw," said Blake. "I've been wondering what I would do in his place. He might kidnap me, and while the troops were looking for me he might make his own escape—possibly even to Europe. Even so, I don't see how he'd get away with any booty."

"Booty, sir? He has to split with grafters. Power, he has. But money? Not much."

"How do you know?"

"I don't know," Quorn retorted.

But Blake doubted that. He studied Quorn's face a long time in the flickering firelight before he threw away the stump of his cigar and turned in.

QUORN set his cot beside the elephants, just out of reach of their trunks, so that they could not damage his mosquito net. After he had smoked his customary pipe beside Asoka, he slept like a man who has no troubles upon his mind. Let Blake and Bagh worry. All three elephants had full bellies and sound feet, and there were no sore backs. If the bridges were down and the fords in flood, then the going would be even worse tomorrow, but the difference would not be worth swearing about.

It was drum beats that aroused Quorn finally. An elephant, that to his experienced eye looked in far too good condition to have come any distance, loomed into the zone of firelight with four men upon his back, three of whom thumped at sodden drums while the fourth, who guided the elephant, sat silent under an umbrella.

Blake poked his head out of the tent but they took no notice of him. He went back to bed. Quorn fell asleep again.

There was no more disturbance all that night. The servants awoke finally and there was the usual shouting and excitement as they slew snakes that had invaded the woodpile while the camp slept. Then Blake came out in his pajamas, and the four who had come in the night watched him narrowly until he sat down in the camp chair. Then they came before him, making suitable obeisance.

"We are headmen," they said, "of three villages that lie near together about one day's march away. This fourth man is the cousin of a money lender whom the bandit called Bagh, has imprisoned in the hills until he can extort all his money. We have come to have speech with your honor concerning that."

"Why all the noise in the night?" Blake asked them.

"We were afraid of tigers. We were also afraid of Bagh, who is terrible."

"You supposed that that drumming would drive him away?"

"No, sahib. It was to let him know that we were not hiding from him. Therefore he knew that we would pay the *takkus* on demand—for each of us one anna, the elephant as well—five annas altogether."

"And if you didn't pay it?"

"Our bellies slitted, our elephant stolen, our homes robbed during our absence. It is very cheap."

"Then what have you come to complain about?"

"This, sahib. We have heard that your honor intends to abolish Bagh, the Red Head, and that in his place there will come constabeels and sepoys who will inflict on us more *takkus* and less peace."

"What says the money lender's cousin?"

"Sahib, it has been said that your honor means to procure the release of that money lender, which, if true, is a calamity. He will set himself to worse extortion than before to recompense himself for all the money Bagh took from him. Though I am his father's brother's son, he sold my heritage; nevertheless, I am still in debt to him. But we pay no interest while he is Bagh's guest. And it may be that Bagh will persuade him to relinquish all those documents by means of which he keeps us impoverished and himself rich."

"How many men has Bagh?"

"No one knows, sahib, except Bagh himself."

"Where is he now?"

"Who are we that we should know that?"

Blake summoned Quorn.

"Do you know where we go from here?"

"Not me, sir. But there's only one trail as you might say navigable."

Blake ate breakfast leisurely, hoping the rain would cease, then spent half an hour in conversation with the village headmen. Good humoredly, he allayed suspicion of himself and won the admission that each of the men knew Bagh intimately. But he could not learn where Bagh's headquarters were, nor where he kept his army."

"Are you sure he has a thousand men?"

"Perhaps more," said the money lender's cousin.

Finally Blake decided to ride forward.

The headmen led the way until Asoka, who was used to lead all processions, bunted their elephant out of the road and set such a pace that he was presently out of their sight. He and his passengers were in another wet universe all by themselves. He left not even a track to follow; the jungle floor was inches deep in water, and there were plenty of places where even the general direction he had taken might be in doubt.

"We'll be lucky if they overtake us with the beds and grub by nightfall," Blake grumbled.

Quorn remembered the ranee and her rather vague instructions.

"We'll be lucky if we keep our scalps on," he retorted. "I've lost the way. For that matter I never knew the way. This ain't a way; it don't seem to me to lead nowhere."

But it did, and Quorn knew it. Where a great rock heaved itself above the jungle, and a flooded stream on the right hand left only a six foot passage, they emerged through a volley of driving rain into a charcoal burners' clearing, where the clumsy kilns stood like damaged beehives and abandoned, grass roofed huts were falling into ruin.

A woman with only a cotton cloth around her waist, her bare breasts glistening in the rain and a naked child on the ground beside her, stood waving her arms and wailing. Blake shouted to her in a dialect that he thought she might understand. Quorn stopped the elephant. He shouted too, but the woman went on wailing. Then they became aware of ghostlike figures closing in upon them from the surrounding trees.

There were spearmen and bow and arrow men among them, although the greater part had only sticks and long knives. They were stealthy, and closed in rapidly. The woman gathered up her child and slipped away between them, laughing. Then a man raised his spear and spoke to Quorn in a voice that suggested no doubt of obedience.

"He says we're prisoners, sir. I might charge Asoka through them, but they might get you with an arrow."

"No," said Blake. "Let's let them entertain us. I haven't been a prisoner since Cronje caught me in the Boer War. Ask them what they propose to do with us."

"We're to go with them to Bagh, sir."

"Are they part of his army?"

"They say not, sir. They say it's none of your business who they are."

"That's the way to talk! We're to ride, I suppose?"

"They say yes, sir—if we act discreet."

"Excellent. Cronje took my boots and made me walk twenty miles. Do they know I've a rifle up here and an automatic pistol? No? Well, you needn't tell them. Say I'm ready to start when they are."

THE RAIN swished down more dismally than ever, but Blake's spirits rose until he started whistling. He checked himself abruptly for fear of seeming too indifferent to danger. Many a latent danger gathers itself and bursts for lack of flattery.

"It pays to let the masters of a situation feel important," he remarked to Quorn in an expansive moment. He even tried to look dejected and drew down the corners of his mouth, but happiness exuded from him like smell from an onion. He was the least dejected looking prisoner who ever rode an elephant through a driving rain while captors trudged the mud before, behind, and upon either side of him.

They were a gentle looking mob of cutthroats, dressed in cotton clothing that clung wetly to their bodies like loosened skin. They carried their weapons in the manner of a Robin Hood chorus—that is, more for the sake of completing the picture than producing spinal chills. It was fair to doubt whether any one of them had ever drawn a drop of blood in anger in his life.

"But such men," said Blake to Quorn, "can be more terrible than seasoned soldiers if aroused, although the fury does not often last long." Quorn said nothing.

As they plunged into the jungle, Blake began to try to make his captors feel that they had a most important prisoner, who never for a moment doubted their humane intention. As an amateur actor he shone. He deceived himself at any rate—it stands written in his diary, which he only shows to beautiful women and intimate friends, that he acted the part perfectly. What he actually looked like was a well bred Englishman having a glorious time.

Ben Quorn had no complaint to make except that he was wet and getting hungry. He had long since learned that his eyes, and his resemblance to the legendary Gunga Sahib were a passport that rendered him safe from end to end of Narada. There was not a bandit in the country who would hurt a hair of his head. His only dread was lest he should spoil the young ranee's game, whatever that might be; and even that dread was vague—he was so sure of her ability to conjure triumph out of any mess of circumstances.

There was no food when they paused at noon. Asoka was allowed to break off branches, which he chewed contentedly; but Blake and Quorn had nothing except tobacco so dampened that it was difficult to light, and even harder to keep burning. Their captors closed around them and Blake tried, with Quorn as interpreter, to glean a little information. But either Quorn was none too skilful with the dialect, or the captors were determined to keep up a screen of mystery, for it availed Blake little.

"They say, sir, Bagh's army don't never show itself in daytime—and never all at a time in one place unless there's serious fighting to be done."

"How often is there serious fighting?"

"They say not often, sir."

"How long ago was the last?"

"They don't rightly remember, sir. They say, who wants to fight Bagh anyhow?"

"What happens if they don't pay his tax?"

"They say they don't know, sir. Everybody pays it."

"Why have they taken me prisoner instead of letting his army do it?"

"They say they don't want his army quartered on them, sir. Too many men to feed and too much trouble."

"What sort of weapons has his army?"

"They say terrible weapons, sir. Rifles, revolvers, swords, machine guns."

"Funny," remarked Blake. "Where did they get them, I wonder. Have they ammunition?"

"Quantities, sir."

Blake began to whistle to himself again. He scented serious intrigue, perhaps involving agents of a foreign power. Treaties are agreements as to what should not be done, behind the screen of which each party undermines the other; it is awfully embarrassing to a friendly power to discover its secret, so to speak, minor treacheries, and there is no better fun in the world.

"Tell them to get a move on," Blake suggested.

THEY resumed the journey, splashing through rain until night-fall, when the crimson glow of village fires came twinkling through a stake fence and the smell of smoke along the wind was sweeter than balm in Gilead. All the village turned out to receive them. It was a place of several hundred huts surrounded partly by a mud and stone wall, partly by a stake fence and, for about one third of its circumference, by the sheer flank of a somber looking flat topped mountain—an outlying spur of the range that isolates Narada from the humdrum world.

Near a huge tree in the midst there was a big hut where the village elders gathered. There they fed Blake and provided him with a cot to sleep on. Quorn was given quarters in another, smaller hut, beside which Asoka gorged himself on rice and warm cakes at his hosts' expense. There was a great deal of quiet curiosity—eyes peering in at Blake, and whispering—eyes peering at Quorn comparing him to the legendary Gunga Sahib—but there was no whispering for fear he might work a miracle. Thrilling though it is to hear of miracles, no sane man wants to see one.

Blake inquired why he had been made a prisoner.

"I would have accepted an invitation," he said blandly.

"Who should know that? Bagh said we are to bring you to him." The village elders were diffident, firm—but evidently nervous. "We didn't want Bagh's army down on us."

"Don't you realize that British troops might be sent to look for me."

"That would be bad, but Bagh, Redhead, would defeat them. He is terrible. Nevertheless, he will do no harm to you unless you disobey him. Obedience—good always comes of that."

Blake went out to see the night sky, hoping that tomorrow's clouds might let the sun through for a while. He saw a row of smoky crimson watchfires spaced along the flat rim of the mountain.

"Redhead's men," they told him. "They will be gone by morning. They protect us."

"From what?"

"God knows. There are terrible things that never happen as long as Bagh guards us and we pay the *takkus*."

"What does he do with all that money?"

"It is not much. Indeed it is very little. It is hard to say how he pays his army and has something for himself. Nevertheless when need arises, Bagh is always generous. It was he who paid the Sikh *apoti-kari* to come and live among us and cure the eye sickness."

"Where is Bagh?"

"No one knows. We will send you forth. Other men will show which way to take. We hope your honor will find no fault with us when your honor speaks with Bagh. We are poor men but we have done our best for you."

Blake turned in, but for a long time he did not sleep because of the sound of sodden drum beats. Drummers appeared to be marching around outside the village wall—two-thirds of the circumference and back again. He awoke the man who had been stationed near the door to watch him and demanded what the noise meant.

"It is the custom. It is the tucket. Redhead says if we do that nightly there shall never be sahibs sent to trouble us. There came a sahib once—in the night—but he heard the tucket and it frightened him away. Redhead said so. So we always sound the tucket, taking turns, no matter what else happens."

Meantime Quorn held conversation by a fireside with some men who were not village elders and whose statements of fact were therefore less conservative.

"Me, I'm thinking loving thoughts, you pockmarked sons of baboons. But that man Blake is another matter. He's important. Making him prisoner is twice as dangerous as setting fire to the whole doggone country."

"Bagh will deal with him. Bagh will show him his army, so he will doubtless tell the British they should keep away.

Bagh would never let the British reach our village. Bagh kept the Germans out of Narada. He told us so. He told them he would fight them with his army if they came, so they didn't come."

"Were there bandits before Bagh came?"

"Innumerable bandits, sahib. There was fighting until Bagh conquered them. Since then there has been no bad trouble of any kind. Only we pay the *takkus*. But that is not much. It is cheaper than being plundered."

"Well, you guys have brought yourselves trouble this time. You've taken prisoner the lord high pussy footin' snooper of the British raj—which he's a decent feller, but he's on his dignity because that's what he's paid a salary to do. There ain't nothing left for him to do but act nasty."

They laughed, at his efforts to translate slang into their dialect.

"The sahib is pleased to jest with us, and we are merry men, so why not? But we know you are the Gunga Sahib, reborn after a thousand years according to the prophecy. And yonder is your great elephant Asoka. Therefore we know no harm will come to us, because we know that if the Bee-laik sahib should seek to injure us you would prevent that."

"Me?" Quorn muttered. "Once I drove a taxicab! Well," he continued aloud, "you suckers, I've seen strange things happen, and I know a young ranee what knows her onions. I've seen that old fat head Asoka there, in one of his tantrums, step careful sideways so's to miss hurtin' a child. And I've seen the blooming British army, guns and all, go back to barracks because some one in a top hat said so. But I'm a nigger if I can see any clear way out o' this mess. You'd better catch Bagh and hand him over."

"Sahib! Eh? Eh? It is not wise thus to speak of Bagh. He has long ears and a long arm."

"Where are them other two elephants what's bringing our loads and the servants?"

"No one knows, sahib."

"Meaning nobody won't tell. Them are the ranee's elephants. Can't you guys see that if you treat her disrespectful there won't be no government?"

"There is the Redhead Bagh."

"Well—don't say afterwards I didn't warn you. That man Blake is picked for pulling just such plugs as this one. He's the unravelingest guy as ever took the kinks out of a snarl. He'll outwit Bagh and bring you all to your senses jes' as sure as this is monsoon weather."

Quorn meant kindly. He also meant to obey the ranee's orders and play into Blake's hands, by impressing the natives with Blake's importance and imbuing them with a sense of Blake's skill, so that they would treat Blake respectfully and make him pleased with himself. But the best intentions have a curiously devious way, sometimes, of straying from their object.

There was nothing more said. Quorn smoked his bedtime pipe beside Asoka and then turned in. But when morning came he was aware of another feeling in the village—nothing overt, nothing even tangible, and nothing in the least unfriendly to himself. He saw suspicious, lowering glances aimed at Blake when Blake was not looking. But if Blake detected any of them in the mirror while he shaved in the watery light outside the hut he made no comment.

THERE was a delay about starting, for no satisfactory reason—all sorts of excuses. Somebody was gaining time for something. Then the start was sudden; Blake was rather bruskly ordered to mount the elephant and follow a dozen guides, who demanded his rifle and pistol, saying they would return them to him if Bagh said so. Blake refused to give them up.

"You needn't worry," he assured them. "I won't shoot you or Bagh. That is not my business."

They waived the point because it seemed that at last they were in a hurry.

They led the way at the mail runners' swift jog that presently left Asoka two or three hundred yards behind them, because Quorn was sparing him, not knowing how long the march might be. The track led before long between steep flanked hills; it became a river bed along whose ragged banks Asoka scrambled, grumbling, until they reached a gorge through which a flood poured that almost swept Asoka off his feet. He turned and refused to face it. Quorn looked for a way around but there was none. It was a cleft between two granite mountains, shaped like a wedge, as if earth had shrunk and split as skin does on a calloused hand.

"I'm afraid you'll have to use that ankus more severely," Blake suggested. "Animals are like people, Mr. Quorn; they need spurring at times. There's nothing there that he can't scramble through if he tries."

"No, sir. But I know the old skate. He ain't loafing. He's talking back. He knows what I want him to do and he ain't obstinate—not now he ain't. There's something wrong."

He urged the elephant again, forcing him up to within ten feet of the gap, rushing him at it. But again Asoka planted, raising his trunk and swinging to the right toward the ankus, which was a mad way to behave. As he turned, a dozen boulders tumbled from a ledge a hundred feet above and crashed into the gap exactly where Asoka would have been had he obeyed orders.

"There are men up there. They pushed those over," Blake remarked. But Quorn was busy reestablishing relations with Asoka.

"You big bum. For a jinx you're a fair to middling fist o' loaded craps. Now cut out the hysterics or I'll bean you with the butt end. Come on now, snap out of it. Poppa listened to you that time. Now you listen to poppa. Fallen rocks can't pick 'emselves up and repeat, so in you go—you hear me? Do you want me to knock your block off? So, that's more like it."

Asoka went through like a tank going over the top, not thoughtful of the comfort of his passengers. On the far side there was a space of level ground ten feet above the water and there they waited for Bagh's promised guides who were to to meet them. Meanwhile the twelve villagers kept their distance, squatting in the rain in two groups, and no amount of shouting could induce them to come near enough for conversation.

"Wait. Wait here for Bagh's men," was the only answer.

And at last only one man came, but he so sure of himself and strode with such easy dignity along a goat track that he looked like the lord of all that countryside. The villagers vanished at sight of him. Blake dubbed him Robinson Crusoe because he wore a goatskin hat and jacket and carried a big, cheap cotton umbrella which turned inside out in the wind whenever he tried to use it. He grinned genially, appeared to know no language that Blake or Quorn could speak, and treated Asoka with utmost reverence, saluting him—perhaps as the biggest elephant he had ever seen. He was armed with a two edged sword and a dagger, both stuck into a girdle that looked as if it might have come from some one's gay silk dressing gown. When he turned to lead the way he gestured like a bandmaster with his loosely closed umbrella, turning now and then to grin with seductive familiarity. He led all day long over difficult mountain trails that made Asoka grumble like an earthquake.

Toward nightfall it occurred to Blake that they had moved in a wide semicircle.

"Quorn," he said, "in my judgment we are not much farther from Narada than we were last night."

However, they were in a maze of tumbled mountains and it might be that there was no other way of reaching their destination. The weariless guide trudged on until he brought them at last within sight of a slope that was scattered with glacial débris behind which a considerable army could have taken cover. Smoke

was rising from behind one group of stones. Not far away from it a sodden, soiled flag of some kind drooped from a roughly trimmed pole. One man was visible for a moment standing upon a boulder, from which he gazed, shading his eyes with his hand. He dropped out of sight suddenly and a blast of bugle music came down wind. Then the guide, with a grin and a final wave of his umbrella, turned aside, motioning Quorn forward; and when Asoka had passed him he turned back along the path by which they came; striding as if the long day's march had only whetted his desire for exercise.

Asoka needed no directing; he could smell the sharp smoke and the aroma of flour cakes cooking. He made great haste along a well worn narrow path that wound among rocks, and came to a stand in the mouth of a cave that had been lined with timber and hung with gray grass matting. There was cordwood heaped up at the entrance. Inside there were evidently three caves that shared one opening, and from the center one, which seemed to be the largest, smoke was finding its way out through a hole between the boulders overhead. One man was filling a great basket with the cordwood, a spearman beside him. In another moment Bagh himself stood in the opening with his legs apart, hands on his hips, a jovial grin on his face. He wore a bathrobe of yellow toweling over his green shirt, and his feet were encased in beautifully polished riding boots.

"Junction!" he shouted. "All change! Restaurant is on the platform and the hard boiled eggs are guaranteed!"

He motioned to Quorn to make Asoka kneel, and extended a hand to help Blake out of the howdah.

"Welcome to Tunnel Inn—three rooms, all heated. There's a room to himself for the elephant—first on the right and mind the low bridge as you enter—plenty of hay in there and lots of fresh cakes. Supper is ready as soon as you've washed your hands—eight courses and—and did you bring me any newspapers?"

BLAKE followed him into the cavern, noticing the hollow rumbling of two voices in the smaller cavern on the left. The only people in the larger cave were the spearman and four servants who were exceedingly busy with pots and pans in a smoke cloud at the far end. There were some blankets hung to make the wooden walls look cheerful. From the overhead beams hung several sorts of oil lanterns and lamps that confused light, smoke and shadow into one dim golden haze. There were some camp chairs, a few stools, several comfortable looking heaps of rugs and blankets, and a teak table that might have belonged to a king; but there was no extravagant luxury and there was nothing that even remotely suggested the headquarters of a dangerous bandit. There were not even any weapons on display.

"Did you see anything of your escort?" Bagh asked when a deaf and dumb man with a split lip had removed Blake's raincoat and had wiped his boots.

Blake lighted a cigar and sat down in a canvas chair. He decided to seize that opening.

"No," he answered, "unless it was your men who tried to drop boulders on me. I caught a glimpse of those blackguards. I was taken prisoner—"

"Harmed or insulted?"

"No, except that of course it was a very serious insult to the raj to subject its representative to that indignity."

The redheaded Bagh drew up a chair and sat down facing him.

"I hope you brought plenty of smokes," he said. "Yes, thanks, I believe I will have one. My own are pretty bad. How do you keep yours so dry in monsoon weather? You must show me that trick. The whisky you brought is here at the back of the cave."

"Where are those pack elephants?" Blake demanded.

"Gone home. Would you like a drink now? So would I. Let's take a snifter and feel good tempered."

The service could hardly have been im-

proved. A man set a table between them with a tray and long glasses. There was soda water, wind cooled in a chattie. And the whisky of course, being Blake's, was excellent.

"Wonderful," said Bagh. He drank like a man who might drink gluttonously if he should let himself go. "The worst of a bandit's life in this part of the world is the poor quality of the only liquor and cigars obtainable—that and the lack of newspapers. But there are flaws in everything—even in banditry."

"You promised me protection," Blake resumed, "yet your men tumbled rocks on my head."

"Yes—there are even flaws in popularity. I heard all the details of that incident two hours ago and I have already sent to inflict punishment. The perpetrators shall be beaten. Their own villagers shall beat them—thoroughly, I assure you. The alternative would be a visitation by my army; nobody wants that to happen."

Quorn came in, having seen to Asoka's needs in the other cavern. Bagh ordered a drink for him. Blake gestured to him to be seated, but Quorn refused.

"Soak me," he sneered, "if you want to. I'm a human and I can take my dose of dirty, underhanded foul play standing up. But dropping rocks on a decent elephant—I won't drink with you. You're no sport."

"It was your fault," Bagh answered. "Sit down and be sensible."

"My fault? You're a liar! If you're a man you'll come outside and put your hands up. Suppose you'd broke Asoka's back. Come on—come outside and fight!"

"Yes," said Bagh, "your fault, Mr. Quorn; but it's the world, so somebody else is getting punished. Sit down, I say, and be sensible. Do you want to be made to sit down? I have only to—"

Blake gestured, and Quorn took the proffered chair, but he eyed the untouched drink with baleful contempt.

"Entirely your fault," said Bagh. "In addition to my army I have two very efficient means of controlling this area—propaganda and intelligence. I am thoroughly and almost instantly informed of anything unusual that takes place within my bailiwick. And you are quite unusual, you know. You told several villagers who were seated with you around a fire that Mr. Blake is wise and powerful enough to wipe me off the slate. You even advised them to seize me and hand me over."

"Very foolish of you, Quorn," Blake commented.

"And so," said Bagh, "since they prefer me to any other form of government, they decided to kill Mr. Blake. They are stupid people, or of course they wouldn't prefer my tyranny to the sweet seductiveness of constables and soldiers. But there you are. They were also afraid they had incurred my wrath already. You see, I ordered them to meet you and bring you safely to me. To make doubly sure they made you prisoners. In other words, they exceeded their instructions. They supposed that a fatal accident might serve to cover up that indiscretion."

"You're plausible, aren't you," said Quorn, half mollified.

"I have to be," said Bagh.

"Do you keep your promises?" Blake wondered. "I was told I should see your army."

Bagh smiled. For the moment he seemed unable to suppress the vanity he felt.

"Yes," he said, "you shall review my army—in the morning."

"How many men did you say you have?"

"I didn't say," he answered. "You might not believe if I told you. But tomorrow, if you care to take the time to count them—"

A man summoned them to dinner at the carved teak table. It was excellently cooked and well served on imported chinaware, but few of the plates were of the same pattern.

"My servants are clumsy and break things," Bagh commented. "It would surprise you how rarely we rob any one

who has china to match my dinner set. I have one of your plates here. Do you recognize it? It was a present from your *hamal*, whom I recommended to your butler. You dismissed the *hamal* afterwards or I wouldn't have mentioned it. This other plate is from the ranee's palace—too ornate—rather bad taste, don't you think? But isn't she a delightful little woman?"

THAT gave Blake another opening. He stepped into it blithely, as a rather too confident pugilist steps forward into his opponent's trap. And the trap was so well laid that Blake grew more and more sure of himself and blundered through sheer obtuseness into a solution of his problem. So that Quorn, who had no notion as yet what the answer to the problem might be, sat still and neglected his meal, marveling at the young ranees' unerring judgment of the man.

"She is more than delightful," said Blake. "She is a young woman of rare character and ability. But she is in a very difficult situation. She is limited by treaty to an army of only fifty men, and yet the Indian government expects her to stamp out banditry if she is to be allowed to carry on. The alternative, of course, would be some form of advisory commission that would take the reins out of her hands, leaving her a mere figurehead; and the advisory commission would undoubtedly call for British troops—at the expense of this state—to handle the bandit situation. If you admire her, as you say you do, I imagine you might care to save her—and incidentally yourself from what, in my opinion, would be something of a catastrophe."

"Have some more whisky," suggested Bagh. "Finished eating. Let's take our glasses over by the fire."

The servants had built a fire on the rock threshold of the cave and had placed the chairs there, so that they might sit and be free from mosquitos in the not unpleasant veil of thin, dry hardwood smoke.

"You are asking me," said Bagh, when they had settled themselves, "to disband a loyal army, to leave all this district at the mercy of any ruthless rascals who care to set up in the bandit business, and to retire myself into oblivion. In exchange for what?"

"I am not sure, of course—this is entirely unofficial—but I believe I can assure you of a pardon and your liberty," said Blake.

"Very good," said Bagh, "let's be unofficial for the moment. How do you suggest that the ranee should rule this countryside? What steps is she to take to keep other bandits from taking over if I resign? What is to prevent my disbanded army from raising a reign of terror? Won't that mean British troops anyhow, sooner or later?"

"I had thought of that," Blake answered.

"So had I," said Bagh. "And between you and me, I would rather stay and fight the British troops, and get the fun of that, and get killed finally. In the long run it would mean less hardship for the villagers—less hardship, I mean, than the anarchy that would follow if I should retire."

Blake was always a man to man diplomat. He believed in straightforward appeals to people's better nature.

"Why fight?" he asked. "You're not an ordinary brigand. You're a man of good sense and public spirit—something of a genius, I daresay. Why not give me time to get a sufficient number of troops quietly into the country—just a handful, you understand—enough to keep the country quiet until the ranee can develop stable government. Then you retire—"

"With a ticket of leave, I suppose, to be indorsed by the police of every town I visit? No, sir! I have established a nuisance value, if nothing else," said Bagh. "Have you another of those cigars? You shall judge for yourself in the morning whether my army can fight or not."

"Well, what do you want?" Blake asked him.

"What do you offer?"

They sat in silence, staring at each other across the glowing embers. From the distance came the sudden thumping of drums, as it might be of men on the march. The whole dark world outside seemed full of a mystery ready to spring. There were no stars visible, although the rain had ceased.

"Would you like a post under the ranee's government?" Blake asked him suddenly.

Quorn sat so still that the other two almost forgot his presence, but he had hard work not to chuckle. Bagh studied Blake's face in the firelight for a long time before he answered.

"Are you a man of your word? Or are you offering something you can't perform, in order to get me in your power?"

"I can't pledge my government," Blake answered, "but I assure you my recommendations carry weight, particularly if there should be no incidents such as might get into the newspapers."

"Do you mean by that," said Bagh, "that your government would prefer to solve this amicably? Yes? Then why not say so? I'm not the one asking favors. By your own showing, I could put the ranee practically out of business and put your government to a lot of expense and loss of life besides. You've been pretty personal, so why shouldn't I be? I can imagine your future career depending to some extent on how you handle this situation. Am I right?"

Blake squirmed a little, not so visibly as worms do, yet not so secretly that Quorn did not notice it. He was watching with owl-like solemnity, but he was finding it hard to do that. He got up, muttering an excuse about Asoka in the next cave. There in the dark he could let himself go without risk of throwing any light on the proceedings.

"IF ME and you, you big bum, was as innocent as our young ranee—and as wise as Blake and the Redhead—Lordy, Lordy, Lordy! Hold me before I die o' laughing!" He buried his face against Asoka's trunk. "She's talked with the Redhead, and she's talked with Blake, and she's talked with me—if I didn't know better I'd swear she talked the monsoon into making all this rain! And she'll leave 'em both thinking they did it 'emselves! But how's she going to handle Bagh's army? Durn 'em, they'll mutiny, soon as they learn he's quit the bandit business. You be still now while I go back and hear the rest of it."

He left the great brute swaying in the dark, stood in the cavern entrance for a moment listening to a far off drum beat and then returned to his chair between Blake and Bagh.

"Elephant's restless," he explained. "Strange quarters." But they had not missed him. They took no notice.

"Officially, our government has no actual knowledge of banditry in this area," said Blake. "It would be quite simple to deny the rumors if the banditry should actually cease. I think I can persuade her Highness, the ranee, to appoint you minister of forests, on salary of course—"

Quorn spluttered, but blew his nose by way of alibi. Blake shot an impatient glance at him but remembered he was only an elephant superintendent who could not be expected to have perfect manners. Quorn spat into the embers and was still.

"If the budget could stand the strain of paying them, do you think your army would consent to build roads?" Blake suggested. "They could be turned into road builders, with possibly some sort of vague police power for the protection of the roads, so as to make them feel important—save their faces for them, so to speak. Do you think they would do it?"

"They might," said Bagh. "Do you think the ranee could employ so many?"

"I would urge her to reduce other expenditure. The roads would be a good investment. How much a month would it call for?"

"We will estimate that in the morning," Bagh answered. "Do you wish to make

terms with me tonight? Very well, I'll agree to five hundred rupees a month for me as minister of roads and forests, plus magisterial authority to protect the roads. For my men—five rupees a day for officers, who are to become foremen; a rupee and a half a day for the rank and file, who are to become laborers. My commission to be for a minimum of ten years, with a pension of half pay on retirement."

"Reasonable enough," said Blake. "I believe I can put that through. I am willing to recommend it."

"The trouble with me," said Bagh, "is that I'm a man of my word. If I agree to a thing, I do it. If I threaten, I perform. You see, I have to be that way; I make a virtue of necessity. If I should agree with you tonight, definitely, you could count on my keeping the terms. On the other hand, if we don't agree you can bet your boots I'll use my army for another purpose. Wait till you've seen my army. It's the most efficient and best disciplined body of men you ever set eyes on. It would follow me till hell's bells clang for all of us."

"Well, I'll agree with you," Blake answered. "I'm glad to do it. I would hate to see a man of your genius and good sense hunted by troopers and shot like a dog in the end. But if I accept your word, you must accept mine. All that I can promise is to put this arrangement through if possible. I will return to Narada, interview the ranee, wire the central government for its approval, and send you notice as soon as I receive confirmation."

"Very well," said Bagh. "Is it time to shake hands now? And shall we have another drink? Now I'll be frank with you. My real reason for yielding is newspapers. I find life almost unendurable without them; I'll be able to get them once a week from now on. When you see my army in the morning you'll realize that newspapers mean as much to me as dope does to some other people. We all have our weak spots—dammit!"

Blake was well pleased. He saw a knighthood in the offing. Few men have the opportunity, by sheer diplomacy, without expenditure of one man's life or one cartridge, entirely to abolish banditry in a native state. When he turned in at last on a pile of rugs he lay awake, listening to the drum beats of Bagh's approaching army, which seemed to be coming from three directions. There was drumming and then silence, all night long. He would have liked to go out there in the dark and watch group after group arrive. He wondered at the silence after they had come. He marveled at the discipline, admiring Bagh as any good sportsman admires the good points of his adversary. He was proud of himself for having solved the problem so adroitly. And he was rather annoyed with Quorn for making such atrocious noises in his sleep.

STRANGELY enough, Blake slept toward daybreak, and when he awoke, with sunlight pouring into the cavern, Asoka's great bulk blocked so much of the entrance that he could not see outside. Thereafter there was dignity to be observed, so he permitted Bagh's servants to bring breakfast to his bedside before he displayed any curiosity. But he was thrilled and made restless by the thunder of the drums outside—not many drums but big ones, beaten in staccato quick time—the most exciting sound on earth.

Then the redheaded Bagh came, gentle and grinning, disguising vanity, Blake thought, beneath an air of casualness. He still wore the dressing gown over his green shirt—no hat—no weapons.

"If you'll mount the elephant," he said, "I'll march them past you. Afterward we'll line them up and you may count them if you choose."

So Blake climbed up into the howdah and took post outside the cavern mouth. For a moment he felt rather disagreeably surprised because he saw no army. He could not even see the drummers. But Bagh stood on a rock beside him, looking proud, and he supposed it was part of

Bagh's vanity to want to show how suddenly his army could appear from hiding behind the glacial boulders. The drumming had ceased. Bagh blew a whistle and it commenced again. From behind a great rock, line abreast, twelve drummers marched and thumped their bullhide instruments until a thunder pulsed from hill to hill and down along the valley, echoing among the great forest trees. Behind the drummers marched exactly twelve men. They were armed with swords and muzzle loading guns.

"We agreed," said Bagh, "didn't we?" He appeared excited—almost nervous, Blake thought. "You and I pledged our words of honor?"

"Yes," Blake answered. "Where's your army?"

"That's it."

Blake was able to control himself because Quorn provided distraction. Seated on Asoka's head he doubled himself up forward, spluttering with laughter that almost shook him to the ground. Blake felt furious with him. He called it damned bad manners. He regretted having given Quorn a drink or two the night before. He stared at Quorn's back as if eyesight could wither him, scorch him, burn him up. He exploded at last—

"Dammit, fellow, are you forgetting yourself?"

The army, having marched past, changed direction and deployed itself until it faced Blake at a distance of fifty paces. There it halted and there was silence until Bagh once more blew his whistle. Then a tucket of drums beat out a salute.

"That's what I've terrorized the country with," said Bagh. "Any fool could do it with a thousand men. My limit has been twenty-five—plus propaganda and information. They're all officers—they're to get five rupees a day each. Don't forget that."

"Damn 'em, they must have worked last night—to stage all that drumming," Blake remarked.

"They did. And for two rupees a day. Think how well they'll work for five!"

ALL THE way home Quorn was very careful not to resent Blake's irritability. He who has trained elephants understands better than most men that irritability must find an outlet—a target that cannot be hurt, if possible. He endured all things, including a lack of Havana cigars, without a murmur even though Blake himself smoked incessantly and the aroma tantalized Quorn's nostrils. And because Blake was a good sportsman, it eventually dawned upon him that Quorn had saved an awkward moment. So he made amends before they reached Narada, and characteristically he made them handsomely:

"I intend to recommend you for a raise of pay," he said. "I don't see why the budget can't be stretched a bit to manage that."

But there was some one else to whom no thought was necessary, because, as Quorn had said, she knew her onions. She knew Quorn, at any rate. She met him in the doorway of the palace reception room, when he came from delivering Blake at his house.

"Did all go well?" she demanded.

"Yes, miss."

"Did Mr. Blake see the Redhead's army?"

"No, miss."

"Did he see the four and twenty that I advised Bagh to show him?"

"Yes, miss."

"And was Mr. Blake satisfied?"

"Yes, miss."

"Excellent! Then I can have my Redhead to help me govern, and we'll build roads, and there'll still be a hundred first class bandits under his orders to keep the villagers in hand at no expense to me! I will make a great state of Narada, Mr. Quorn, before I have finished."

"Yes, miss."

"I will show you a government."

"Yes, miss. About that corn bin—could I have the palace blacksmiths put a metal lining in it? Them mahouts is thieves; they'd steal the shadow off a wall."

He rode Asoka home in pitch black darkness, laughing, talking aloud to the elephant, as his habit was when there was no one else to hear.

"You big bum, you're a better diplomat than Blake," he said. "You talk less. How much would you give for all that money lender's mortgages by the time Bagh turns him loose? He'll have to cancel 'em. And I'll bet you the borrowers get back what they're overpaid him. Bandits? Hell! We couldn't live without 'em!"

As they reached the elephant lines they heard the thunder of three sodden drums. The tucket was being sounded around the palace wall, protecting all Narada against outlaws.

GOLD IS WHERE YOU FIND IT

By ARTHUR WOODWARD

SO RAN the old saying.

And in the days when half the world, civilized and otherwise, was engaged in the mad race to California with wash bowls, shovels and all sorts of patent gold washing machines, ranging from whalebone and mercury gold diviners made in Germany to highly complicated Yankeeized contraptions made in Connecticut, the saw was most applicable.

Not all of it was found in the earth.

There was the storekeeper at Sacramento City who ordered a shipload of provisions to feed the hungry hordes of all nations swarming to the gold fields. Among the boxes and barrels of provender were several of preserved meat. When they arrived one cask smelled to high heaven. The storekeeper cursed his lot and consigned the offending cask to the rubbish heap in the rear of his store. However he noticed that several of his customers, evidently attracted by the odor, began prowling around trying to find the source of the emanation.

One day a tall unkempt Teutonic looking man strode into the store.

"I vants some of dot," he said.

The puzzled storekeeper could not imagine what "dot" substance was.

The man insisted that he wanted some, so eventually the miner led the way to the back yard, sniffing vigorously as he went. He halted at the rubbish pile concealing the offending cask.

"Yah," he grunted, "dere is dot."

"But man alive, that's rotten meat; surely you don't want that," protested the merchant.

"Shust you pring der ax undt I show you dot."

The ax was brought and the cask opened. It was filled with prime sauerkraut. That barrel proved a veritable gold mine. The kraut was speedily sold to the German miners in the vicinity at one dollar a pound.

On the other hand there were the Hawaiian natives who turned up on the South Fork of the American River in 1850. Their claims were not very productive until the light hearted natives in their amphibious and sportive manner discovered a deep hole in the river near their camp.

All of them were expert divers and swimmers. The hole was about one hundred and fifty feet long and forty-five feet deep. These divers proceeded to "prospect" the bottom of the pool. Perhaps not in all the history of gold mining were stranger prospects made on a watery claim.

The samples of pay gravel they brought up from their under water dredging by hand proved to be very rich. Then they obtained a number of empty kegs, weighted them with rocks, attached them to ropes and sank them in the stream. The miners then dived to the bottom, filled the improvised hoists with the pay dirt and had their fellow companions hoist away. In this manner they worked their claim and obtained more than enough to make them all rich.

Chester

MILD *enough for anybody*

What a cigarette meant *there*

20 degrees below,

and no tobacco, through lonely weeks of glittering silence. Then a speck on the hard, bright horizon; another musher, outward-bound . . . and *cigarettes!* What price cold or Arctic hardship then!

What a cigarette means *here*

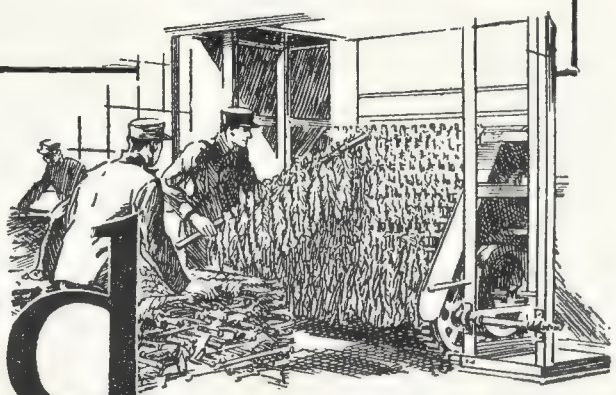
220 degrees above,

as endless belts carry the choice tobacco for Chesterfield inch by inch through the great steel ovens.

Here, in penetrating heat, science corrects and perfects the curing commenced in the farmer's barn. Dried, then cooled, then steamed to exact and uniform heat and moisture, the tobacco is ready for the final mellowing—two long years ageing in wood – that only Nature can give.

Man, Science, Nature—all work together on Chesterfield. And in the bland, satisfying smoothness of Chesterfield itself is ample proof that their patient, costly team-work is good!

Liggett & Myers Tobacco Co.



field

. . . . *and yet* THEY SATISFY

Through long steam-heated ovens, new tobacco passes in slow endless procession for drying and "conditioning."

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

PRIZES

THE FOLLOWING five essays, out of a total submitted of 2248, have been chosen as prizewinners. To the author of each has been sent a check for $100.00, and a hand bound copy of "D'Artagnan". In each of the five volumes was bound one page of original Dumas manuscript.

I

"D'ARTAGNAN" is a good story; but it most distinctly is not equal to Dumas at his best. It is not even equal to "The Three Guardsmen", let alone "La Dame de Monsoreau" and "The Forty-Five", or (what seems to me by far Dumas' greatest work) "The Count of Monte Cristo".

For one thing, the characterizations lack the vivid life and the flashing brilliance of Dumas. Helène de Sirle was evidently patterned after *Milady*, but what a difference there is between them! *Porthos* has his gigantic strength and his dullness of mind, but I miss the childlike simplicity which makes our old friend so appealing. *Athos*—well, somehow I do not find in him the nobility of character which made him the admiration of my young days. And *Aramis* lacks the underlying slyness which makes one despise even while admiring him. As for Richelieu, Bassompiérre, Riberac, De Winter, Monteforge, and the others, they are puppets; there is not one who "stands on his feet"—and Dumas never invented a character, even the slightest, who was not firmly erect and alive.

Again, the narrative, though rapid, is far less incisive than Dumas', and the

story nowhere rises to the emotional heights which we invariably find in Dumas' best. The suicide of the Comte de Morcerf, the midnight rescue of Valentine, the murders of Joannes and Caderousse, Mercédès' pleading for her son's life, the dinner-party in the house at Auteuil, the executions of Charles I and Milady, the seduction of Felton, the death of Mordaunt, Bussy d'Amboise's last fight, the vengeance taken by Diane de Monsoreau—these are a few of Dumas' many passages of intense emotional quality which find no counterpart in "D'Artagnan."

As to the question of how much is Dumas and how much is Bedford-Jones, I find it difficult to believe that Dumas wrote any large protion of this story; for a guess, I should say that the five manuscript pages to be included in the prize books represent all or nearly all of Dumas' contribution. If not, Dumas' reason for suppressing the story is plain; he realized that it was not of the same caliber as his others. It is hard to say just why I believe as I do; certain things can be pointed out in addition to those I have mentioned, such as minor inconsistencies of character, inferiority of literary style, relative weakness of imagination, and the lack of Dumas' characteristic repetitions in the dialogue—repetitions of thought if not of word—but most of all it is a feeling that the indefinable thing which for lack of a better term we name "quality", is not there. I think, therefore, that the story is mostly Bedford-Jones—if not, Dumas was certainly far from his best when he wrote it. Incidentally, you have of course observed that the account here given of Bragelonne's parentage is different from that given in "Twenty Years After", and the story is thereby the poorer; it is Athos' one divergence from absolute rectitude that makes him, in Dumas' story, a human being rather than an impossible demi-god.

All this may seem like a disparagement of Bedford-Jones. It is not. Considered purely by itself, without reference to Dumas, "D'Artagnan" is a good story of intrigue and adventure—far better than most of the adventure stories we find in the current magazines. But the man who enters into competition with Dumas has set himself a mark tremendously difficult to reach, and is not to be blamed if he fails to rival one who, if not the greatest of authors, was yet "the greatest story-teller who has ever lived".—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St, East Orange, N. J.

II

THE MAN who undertakes to complete another's unfinished masterpiece has a thankless task at best; he is, with the best of motives, rushing in where angels fear to tread. Indeed, there are few angels equal to such a performance. Unless, of course, M. Dumas is himself an angel by this time, which one may or may not believe—a Satanic sort of angel, wearing a sardonic grin, who stands behind the chair of Mr. Bedford-Jones, and contemplates, with his tongue in his cheek, the fruits of his collaborator's typewriter. It is possible that Mr. Bedford-Jones was assisted by some such ghostly surveillance; but it is probable that he was not, and had to trust to his own ingenuity to pull the characters out of their respective predicaments. However, he had an advantage which was of material aid; he was completing an historical novel, and had historical facts to help him out.

One's first reaction to this fragment of Dumas is to wonder why he did not finish it himself. In such cases, the uncompleted manuscript has usually been interrupted by death; but this is apparently not true of "D'Artagnan", as it seems very apparent that this was undertaken prior to "Twenty Years' After", and "The Man In The Iron Mask". Why was this not completed? Did Dumas himself consider it faulty, and not worth continuing? This does not seem likely, for it is Dumas at his best. Or did he decide upon reflection that his tale would have more of interest if it were projected several years into the future? We shall

never know the answer, but such conjecture is always fascinating. One wishes that he had continued "D'Artagnan", instead of leaping ahead twenty years, for his characters are more engaging in youth than in middle-age. Adventurers usually are. And Madame de Chevreuse is a fascinating creature, as full of spirit and charm as her original must undoubtedly have been. One is sorry to lose sight of this gallant lady so soon. The conclusion that Mr. Bedford-Jones reaches in regard to the identity of the child is probably the correct one, although there are some points that he does not make quite clear. Why, if the boy was Madame de Chevreuse's son, was there such a to-do about him in the first place? Such a running back and forth with mysterious messages to the Queen? Why drag the Queen into it at all? And why was Her Majesty so dismayed at the intelligence given her? She and Chevreuse were of course friends, but it seems like straining friendship several points. Dumas would undoubtedly have ultimately explained the Queen's anxiety in the matter, connected it in some way with Chevreuse and the child. Some such connection existed in his mind, or he would never have introduced this royal solicitude in the first place.

Inevitably, in reading a work of this nature, one must compare the styles of the two writers, although this comparison is not quite fair to Mr. Bedford-Jones, since what he has written is not Bedford-Jones' style, but Bedford-Jones' imitation of Dumas' style, which is something different altogether. One should rather observe how well they merge. Mr. Bedford-Jones has admirably caught Dumas' style, his aptness in phrasing, and has at some pains lifted bodily several expressions peculiar to the latter, and introduced them to give verisimilitude to his own writing; but the spirit is somewhat missing. It is a very good job,—infinitely better, for instance, than Quiller-Couch's continuation of "St. Ives",—but at best it can be only a clever imitation. There is about Dumas a sort of gay *diablerie* peculiar to his nation and the robust vulgarity of his age, that we in our time cannot imitate, because writers and readers alike have lost that carefree, jolly point of view. We are intensely serious about love and sex matters, and our writers are either physiological or idealistic. If the first, they reap fortunes by confessing anonymously for the sex magazines; if the second, they earn a more respectable living by writing adventure stories in the family magazines, under their own names. There is an indefinable air of daring and scandal about Dumas' most virtuous characters, which we enjoy but cannot permit in our writers today. As a nation, we cannot tolerate obscenity, save in the classics, the sex magazines and musical comedy . . . Bedford-Jones has done his best to catch this elder-day insouciance, but it is not in his line. There is after all no Dumas save Dumas, and Bedford-Jones is only his prophet.

However, the story is completely enjoyable throughout. The few faults that we can find in it are really due to the age in which it was completed more than to the individual who completed it; and he has the satisfaction of knowing that he has captured the style of a master of narrative as well, if not much better, than anyone now living could do. We who read the finished work are indebted alike to Mr. Bedford-Jones, for accomplishing it, and to *Adventure*, for publishing it.—ALICE RUSSELL, Dermady San Media, Pa.

III

D'ARTAGNAN is pathetically unfit to rank with anything of Dumas. Here is nothing but a pale ghost of the master; a skeleton gaunt and unbelievably cold. Here is the young musketeer, presumably in the full flush of his powers, and he walks stiffly and gestures like an automaton. The D'Artagnan we have known was a lusty brawler, quick of temper and sword, touchy about his honor, a fighter and a lover, a swaggering bravo with a measure of shrewd cunning and a loyalty beyond price. He was Youth personified, Youth going forth to meet ad-

venture and fame, eager for warm lips and golden wine; Youth facing disillusionment but ever buoyed up by the joyous heart within. Here the spirit is gone and all the joyous and gorgeous gusto of him is present only as the faintest of echoes.

Where is the gigantic Porthos, resplendently clothed, stupid, brave, loyal, vain, beloved of lonely wives? Here too only a faint echo. Where is the noble Athos, the acme of knightliness, the counsellor, the grave, calm and serene guider of D'Artagnan's early ventures? Where is Aramis, the lover of lovely women, ever eager for intrigue, the man with a soul torn between the powers temporal and the powers spiritual? Where is Richelieu, the august and feared, the unruffled arbiter of a nation's destiny? Where is Anne of Austria, the indiscreet and somewhat pathetic? Gone, all gone! They walk in "D'Artagnan" in name alone and they grimace as ghosts from behind a veil.

The plot of the novel . . . . *that is Dumas!* The quick clash of blades, the subtle intrigues, the hard riding, denouement falling on denouement. Surely the master planned all this? But that which is lacking is what lifts Dumas from the ranks of the merely amusing writers to be a lord of his kind. Where is the rich and overwhelming wealth of detail that made France live for us? Where is the gorgeous tapestry of the court and where the vivid paragraphs and subtle actions and words that brought forth the characters to have actual being, to walk and speak in our hearts? Where is that indescribable thing, the "feel" of the times, the dark background of the politics and the life of all Europe looming beyond the tale?

In "D'Artagnan" we do not ride with the musketeer, we do not fight with him, laugh with him, intrigue with him. We are not swept up into the whirlwind of his life, to become one with it, to be ourselves dressed in velvet and plumes, wearing a sword and bent on some momentous mission. No! We stand aloof, looking down upon the scene, a little coldly, a little sadly, remote, stirred only at rare intervals. This is not Dumas. Dumas is dead and this is a wraith, faceless and gibbering.

I would say, as a guess, that Mr. Jones found a rough draft of the plot and endeavored to fill it in. The florid full style of the master is missing, and the differentiation between the characters is very slight. Here and there are passages apparently from the old hand, but generally the story is written as one might write an action story of our own day. Most of all is lacking the glorious, clamorous, reckless spirit and the fire that rings as a lift of bugles through that undying tale of the old Musketeers! It is not hard to understand why. These things passed of a surety in the little house at Puys, near Dieppe. Dumas is dead.—ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN, Box 205, Salem, Oregon.

IV

TWO questions are herein propounded; the first, "is D'Artagnan worthy to rank with the best Dumas", cannot be answered until the second question, "What is the best Dumas?" is settled.

For the sake of brevity and time, let us assume, and the assumption closely approaches the fact, that "The Three Musketeers" and "The Count of Monte Cristo" are Dumas' best works. As to the better of these two novels the writer claims that the former surpasses the latter and will consequently compare "D'Artagnan" with "The Three Musketeers".

The problem has now been narrowed down to, is D'Artagnan worthy to rank with "The Three Musketeers"?

In my opinion it does not.

(1st)—The plot of Dumas is better than the plot of Bedford-Jones.

Dumas in the "Three Musketeers" uses a simple plot, and a very sketchy one at that, which unfolds naturally and chronologically. It is never definitely defined, or ever deliberately complicated. All action, all situations and all results are natural to the characters. Dumas sets in motion his players and reports their lives.

Bedford-Jones fails here. He builds his

plot, he sets up the situation and consequences and then works backward to the causes. A fact that confirms my opinion that Bedford-Jones wrote all the first two installments of "D'Artagnan," and part of the third.

Bedford-Jones complicates and beclouds; Dumas never. In "The Three Musketeers" there is no mystery to the reader. A duel is to be fought, only the outcome in doubt; an errand is to be performed, it will or will not be successful; an oppointment is made, it will or will not be kept. In "D'Artagnan" unforeseen situations arise, unknown characters are introduced, mysterious questions are asked and never answered. This may or may not detract from the novel but it certainly isn't good Dumas, and isn't the masterful way to handle a character novel.

(2nd)—The humor of Dumas is better than Bedford-Jones.

The humor of "The Three Musketeers" is both broad and subtle and exceedingly entertaining. Bedford-Jones humor is conspicuous by its absence.

The difference here is so clear and so unfavorable that there is no need to enlarge the argument.

(3rd)—The style of Dumas is more pleasing and entertaining than Bedford-Jones'. Here is a subject big enough for a thesis! The easy narrative, story-telling style of Dumas is not imitated successfully by Bedford-Jones. Rather, a complicated, involved yarn is spun which is not the historical narrative of Dumas, historical in the biographical sense.

As a matter of fact Bedford-Jones has ordinarily a style more similar to Dumas than when he attempts to imitate Dumas. Dumas in "The Three Musketeers" gives us the biography of four interesting men; Bedford-Jones writes a mystery.

(4th)—Minor differences.

Dumas is pleasingly inaccurate as to time and places, faults of an interested story-teller; Bedford-Jones coldly correct.

Dumas handles sex as one who enjoys life; Bedford-Jones approaches it under protest and leaves it cold.

There is life in Dumas and technique in Jones.

For these four reasons, briefly enlarged do I think that "D'Artagnan" cannot rank with Dumas; but it is another question, "can Bedford-Jones rank with Dumas".

—S. WALTON FORGY, 245 Central Park West, New York City.

V

"D'ARTAGNAN" is probably just as close to being real Dumas, as any novel ever credited to the pen of the "Immortal Quadroon". Perhaps Auguste Maquet, the unwearied "rummager of documents" likewise bushwhacked this little prize from some musty copy of "Courtils de Sandras" and laid it at the feet of his idol, to be plucked, stuffed, broiled and garnished at leisure, personally or otherwise. For Maquet's part in Dumas' popularization of French history consisted in digging up the facts—to be embellished by the master, with much to be invented and imagined in the line of wit and comedy and with many deviations to be made around awkward obstacles. For the birth of D'Artagnan seems to have taken place in 1623, whereas Dumas has him riding in the service of the Queen in 1630 at what should have been the tender age of seven.

Many are the authors who were jestingly blamed by Dumas for mistakes discovered in various novels. An error in geography in "Le Chevalier d'Harmental" was pointed out. Quoth the author: "The devil! Let me see, I have not read it. Who was it who wrote that for me? Why that rascal Auguste! I'll curl *his* hair!" And by the time the translator finishes with Dumas—what have you? Maquet? Dumas? or Bedford-Jones?

The plot speaks for itself. It sounds like Dumas. It carries the high tension of a typical Musketeer adventure, with all its background of clever intrigue and all its foreground of spirited swashbuckling. We may miss the usual wealth of local color and we will search in vain for the customary excursions from the main high-

way of the theme. But in the final analysis we must agree that the Author has deftly sped the action and so accurately cast his actors as to make d'Artagnan, Athos. Porthos and Aramis spring to arms once more for us, once more double cross the Cardinal and once more save the Queen.

D'Artagnan is the best "Dumas" with the dust and moth balls happily omitted. —HUGH B. SCOTT, 13 Oak Park, Elm Grove, W. Va.

THE following writers deserve honorable mention, as their essays were considered for the prizes after the final sifting.

Hal Davenport, William Caddell, William A. Little, Willis Knapp Jones, G. W. Kunsman, Florence Beatty Judd, C. H. Schleiger, Wallace Stevens, James E. Cosgrove, J. R. Cox, Dorothy B. Sheeman, Harry L. Chasserot, Fernando A. Chacon, Wirth Howell, Harry R. Gebring, Lloyd I. Coveney, Milton Cronenberg, George B. Cluett, Thomas Ewing Dabney, Adolph Domont, Victor Dyer, B. De La Palma, Hermie Droll, C. A. Forbes, Norman Fraser, Virginia H. Forbes, Harry R. Galbraith, Lewis P. Glover, William P. Godfrey, James F. Hoffman, Edward G. de Guiron, S. S. Harrow, M. E. Hill, Clemens Grey Hewitt, Earl Dionne, Lester Hale, Thomas H. Dickson, A. L. Jacobs, Paul F. Kinnare, Maurice M. Kaplan, Albert Judd, Jr., Francis H. Insley, Mary M. Foster, George E. DeMille, John L. Dallam, Charles A. Gregory, Alice Cameron, Georgie Hubner, D. K. Hawthorne, Laura Haynes, Helen Headland, Altan L. B. Harrington, E. P. Heyman, L. H. Heyman, J. P. Hallikan, Virginia Harris, Anna Lenington Heath, Adelfred Hart, Helen Huycke, William G. Holmes, H. H. Hutchinson, Rose E. Helme, Jack Hill, A. C. Hopper, H. C. Harpfer, Harry B. Gilbert, Jr., Lucie Geddes, Bernie Govers, Francis J. Green, E. B. Galbraith, Thomas J. Greene, Jack Geoghegan, Henry S. Frampton, E. R. Fockler, Maynard D. Follin, Anne E. Foxcroft, John H. Frederick, G. W. Fensler, Ralph Farrar, W. L. Faurot, William E. Ford, F. F. Fryberger, John J. Fisher, C. J. Ethier, H. D. Drake, Verle V. Deane, P. Preston De Dasco, C. H. Dodge, Dorothy Dexter, Charles E. De Saro, James M. Davenport, James H. Clews, Dorothy Clemens, Winn W. Chase, W. C. Clarke, Marie Loscalzo, Edwin R. Jeter, T. J. Johnston, S. P. Jones, Bertram Kalisch, Harry T. Kinnear, L. B. Knight, Eda La Galla, Charles F. Lender, Meredith Janvier, Lewis W. Knowles, Clinton W. Kanago, Lucius W. Kelly, K. Reychler, Eleanor Kyle, Edwin M. Kuhn, John A. McMahon, Elizabeth Moore, Charles L. Manson, G. A. MacDonald, Ruth Martin, George McKnight, P. A. McIntyre, Charles F. Marble, Draper Coolidge Wheelock, Clay Osborne, E. R. Humphrey, J. R. Carlstedt, A. B. Lovell, W. F. Sander, Donald Hansen, Robert N. Hickey, Albert L. Green, William F. McMorrow, E. F. Copenhafer, G. M. Carson, H. A. Davis, John L. Vanderhoff, Suzanne T. Bower, Robert L. Dunker, Ernest E. Broome, Raymond Brady, C. E. Ross, Herbert E. Loranger, Florence Hyde, Raymond Lloyd Davis, R. R. Hanna, Theodor Thierry Yung, John R. Yankura, William F. S. Yates, John V. Wicklund, Leo E. Whistler, J. A. Woodward, H. H. Wingett, Joseph G. Weakland, Harry J. Wood, H. L. Weeks, W. W. White, A. E. Wynn, E. L. Winters, Mary E. Wright, Harry S. Witemeyer, P. G. Wilson, C. E. Wills, J. A. Wells, E. K. Westley, John Vreeland, G. D. Thevenot, Albert E. Tapp, James Tate, Hugo Theurich, Anthony J. Turchi, William S. Tancre, Earle W. Scott, John W. Jones, F. A. Skelton, Charles Stewart, J. J. Stubensanet, H. A. Pifer, Adolph Suske, Gordon F. Slover, Lester F. M. Storm, Douglas Stinehower, W. E. Sheldon, William F. Solar, Robert R. Spencer, A. J. Stevens, Jr., Jule Singer, Frank J. Shannon, J. J. Stockhauser, Roy A. Self, Louis H. Stephenson, J. A. Shaw, Howard G. Smith, Dana Stevens, Beatrice W. Starr, Sydney G. Sherwood, John Lawrence Seymour, L. A. Robson, A. D. Rice, J. P. Redwood, Yorke E. Rhodes, G. L. Reade, Ralph M. Race, Dorothy W. Rostetter, Howard Rothenberger, John M. Rhame, Georges Roux, William M. Robinson, L. M. Rollins, John L. Russell, Ewart P. Roche, Edward S. Rankin, Louis P. Receveur, F. L. Robinson, Marie E. Rozas, George Risley, Talbot Richardson, M. Pouliot, William H. Parr, E. R. Pease, William D. Pelan, Dorothy Annie Parker, Peder Pedersen, D. Roland Potter, Edward Patterson, Albert Oliver, L. F. Olson, R. T. Needels, Ray L. Nullineyer, R. T. Nielsen, Edward F. Nekola, C. M. Nicholson, Addis A. Newell, Thomas M. Nelson, Jack (C.R.) Murray, W. T. Langston, Henry Micklennight.

I HAD hoped for a more definite statement than the following, concerning the exact amount of Dumas in "D'Artagnan"—but the author and publisher wish to hold off a little longer.

The amount of Dumas MS incorporated in "D'Artagnan" is not large; its chief value to the story is that it is fully authenticated and so far as can be learned, previously unpublished. The exact amount used, I desire to remain unknown, for the time being; negotiations are under way for the book to appear in France, and a guessing contest inaugurated on a large scale, which will if completed necessitate the announcement of the exact amount of Dumas manuscript in the story.

—H. BEDFORD-JONES

WHEN the cat crawls completely out of the bag, I shall be glad to pass along the information.—ANTHONY M. RUD.

ASK Adventure

For Free Information and Services You Can't Get Elsewhere

Token

"SHOOT him on the spot!"

Request:—"Can you give me any information concerning this coin (or medal)? One side shows the American flag, a circle of stars, and the words 'The Flag of Our Union.' The obverse has the word DIX in the center and surrounding it, the motto, 'If anybody attempts to tear it down, shoot him on the spot.' The coin is three-quarters of an inch in diameter and is similar in color to a white cent."—L. B. WOOD, Mayville, N. Y.

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—Your piece is known as a Civil War token. Several thousand varieties, to pass for one cent, were issued, especially in the year 1863, on account of the scarcity of small change. Most of them had the names of the merchants issuing them. Your piece was a very popular one, and large quantities were issued. It is worth but a few cents.

The history of the inscription on it is as follows: When John A. Dix was Secretary of the Treasury, he sent to his deputy, Hemphill Jones, on January 29, 1861, the following telegram:

Tell Lieut. Caldwell to arrest Capt. Breshwood, assume command of the Cutter and obey the order I gave through you. If Capt. Breshwood, after arrest, undertakes to interfere with the command of the Cutter, tell Lieut. Caldwell to consider him as a Mutineer, treat him accordingly. If any one attempts to haul down the American flag shoot him on the spot.

—JOHN A. DIX, Secretary of the Treasury.

In 1872 Dix became Governor of the State of New York.

Hyena

THE consensus of opinion seems to be that he is no Strongheart among the jungle folk. You will remember that Gordon MacCreagh, on his recent expedition to Abyssinia, found that the hyena's outstanding trait was that of laughing insanely in the night, when respectable people were trying to snatch a bit of sleep after a hard day's trek.

Request:—"I wish that you would please settle an argument that I had with a man near here. This man asserts positively that a hyena will not only fight a lion but is so much more active than the king of beasts that he can very quickly kill a lion by severing the jugular vein at one bite. I am well aware of the fact that the Encyclopedia Brittannica says that the hyena is the most cowardly beast in Africa; that Arabs disdain to shoot a hyena, but simply chase it away with dogs. But I want you to say in a letter to me just what you know about the habits of the hyena; if one of these animals was ever known even to stop long enough to look at a lion."

—JOE REED, Asheville, N. C.

Reply, by Capt. F. T. Franklin:—Your letter reached me just as I have a visitor from South Africa staying with me. He agrees with me that you are entirely in the right and win your debate by 1000 lengths of a hyena's tail, which is together with the skin the only useful part of the animal. A hyena is strong but a cowardly, nocturnal, carnivorous animal belonging to the pig family. It would no more attack a lion than would a cotton-tail.

By the way, you describe a lion as the "king of beasts." I, however, would dethrone the lion from his accepted position as king and install in his stead the S. African buffalo. A lion has some of the characteristics of a fox and will slink into a *kraal,* jump on the back of an ox or a cow, take one hunk of flesh from the bovine's withers and slink out again. A lion rarely attacks a human unless wounded or cornered. A buffalo, however, directly he winds the scent of the hunter, puts his head down and charges hell-for-leather through any brush or impediment that stands between him and his object of attack.

The natives use the hyena skin to make *karosses* or robes out of and the tail is used as a decoration, but nonetheless they thoroughly despise the hyena.

Far North

THE "Yukon" sled. How to nail a mountain shoe.

Request:—"1. Please give me all the information that would help me make a small sledge to use in the Olympic Mountain. I would like to use it either as a dog or hand sledge. I can get no drawing that will help me. The *National Sportsman Magazine* could not help me.

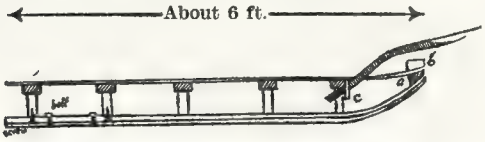
2. Please give me a good substitute for the Alpine line.

3. Please tell me how to drive edge nails and crown nails.

4. Is there a prize of $5,000 for the first to climb Mt. Index in Washington?

5. Could you give me the address of a magazine that deals with mountain climbing? I have been a mountain climbing bug ever since I can remember and I can say there is nothing to approach it for thrills."—HARLAND EASTWOOD, Fort McDowell, Cal.

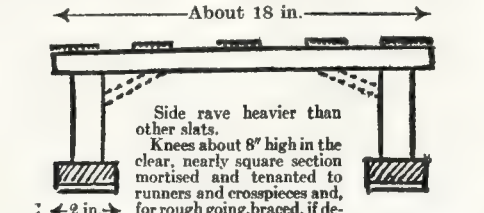
Reply, by Mr. Theodore Seixas Solomons:—1. I am enclosing drawing and general specifications, etc. of the more or less standardized "Yukon" sled, in use for many, many years in Alaska. This differs markedly from the regular "basket" sled, invariably drawn by dogs. The latter is for trails, light going, is long and commodious and adapted specially for traveling with camp luggage, miscellaneous and bulky stuff. Its salient feature is the high side, giving it the bulk capacity and ease of loading and unloading that its special uses require.



All parts except inside slats are of clear, straight grain oak or hickory (or ash).

Runners have to be steamed to shape.

Rave can be slanted up, if desired, to make a more rising or longer rising bow.


About 18 in.
Side rave heavier than other slats.
Knees about 8" high in the clear, nearly square section mortised and tenanted to runners and crosspieces and, for rough going, braced, if desired, as shown in dotted line.
2 in.

Steel shoe ⅛" or less, counter sunk bolts, screw heads.

(a) is drawbar and is hewn to fit. This or an extra bar above (b) projects on right and gee-pole is secured to it as well as at (c), which is best to be a metal ring or socket, shank of which is bolted to frame.

Handlebars and back driving are sometimes used, when dogs are motive power.

Approved style of break (almost essential in mountain work) is made by securely attaching a wide, thin flexible board, say 4" x ½" under bed, bolting to two crosspieces up front. This projects a few inches beyond rear of bed. At its end it is cleated on lower side and pushes down into snow by foot, springing up when not in use.

This is the data, without going into refinements of its many variations in design, device, size, etc.

The Yukon sled is intended for breaking trail, rough going, pulling by hand (as well as dogs) handling heavy loads, and slow work. The equipment of "gee pole" in front gives hand control, such as braking, turning, pulling over impediments too tough for dogs (if dog drawn), et cetera. If hand drawn alone, it enables the puller to keep the sled off his feet and turn and guide it, the ropes being used only for pulling. Men and dogs work together on the Yukon sled, the dogs ahead of the man. Sometimes the man pulls also, or, at least has the rope over his shoulder (and under his arms) to give occasional assistance when needed. With the basket sled he pushes on the handle bars to assist the dogs—a less effective assistance. Another point of distinction is the narrower track of the Yukon sled. Wiggling around between rocks or trees, this is an advantage as well as in breaking trail in new or deep snow where the width of the snowshoe track is great enough for the sled runners.

2. Sash cord makes a good substitute for Alpine line, or the special line made for riata use is even better. All Alpine line should be tested with at least twice the expected dead weight to allow for jerk strains.

3. I enclose also diagram of shoe nailing which I preferred in the mountains of the West and in Alaska. It is very simple and at first blush might appear inadequate and, especially, as not sufficiently protective of the leather. But a well filled sole rots quicker and the individual nails are not so well supported. Also on smooth rock surfaces or pine needles a nail peppered sole slips and defeats its purpose. Nails, in my view should be used on a principle analogous to the spike of a sprinters' shoe—for stability of footing but not to provide a new surface. Leather is preferable to steel, and too many nails convert the one into the other. They make a shoe cold, heavy and inelastic. The edging of small (Hungarian) nails is sufficient protection against undue edge wear.

Square are hobnails (not too big)

Round are Hungarian.

A mountain shoe MUST FIT close, though it should not be tight.

It is important that the toe should not project beyond the human toes, nor should the sole project more than enough to protect upper. One's life often depends on a good toe hold. Don't use a clumsy shoe. The shoe must be like part of the foot.

4. I don't know about that Mt. Index prize you speak of.

5. *Appalachia* (of the Appalachian Mountain Club, Tremont St., Boston) and *Sierra Club Bulletin*, Mills Bldg., San Francisco, also *Mazamas* (either Seattle or Tacoma) organ of the Mazamas Mountain Club, and possibly the journal of the American Alpine club are all mountain climbing magazines. Many European mountain journals, several in Great Britain.

Sheep

OPPORTUNITY for raising in Colorado and Wyoming. Bottle-fed and cull lambs as starters for the man with limited capital.

Request:—"Would like full information on homesteading and sheep raising in Colorado and Wyoming.

I am especially interested in Colorado because I have a friend there who insists on giving me the most glowing accounts of his sheep ranch.

My buddy and I, both of us ex-service men of the U. S. Marines are thinking very seriously of repairing to Colorado and trying our luck.

Just how do the goverment laws apply to ex-service men in regards to homesteading? We haven't much capital but my buddy is a steam engineer with an electrician rating and I am a radio man.

I have been on wheat ranches in Alberta but only for short periods."

—ERNEST G. BEST, Groton, Conn.

Reply, by Mr. Frank Earnest:—To start in the sheep business requires a home ranch, at least one sheep wagon and four horses, and a capital of about $5000. Sheep are moved from place to place so you require range and water. There is plenty of free Government range and quite some water in Colorado. In the winter, snow does for water, so you can range your sheep most anywhere on Government range.

You can start in a small way by having a ranch and several cows. You can go around to the various lambing grounds in the spring and get what are called "bum" lambs—that is, lambs which have lost their mothers—for nothing. You have to raise them on a bottle. Also you can buy cull lambs at shipping time for from one to two dollars each. I know several parties who started in the sheep business in this way with less than $500.00 and are fairly well fixed today.

However, to be very successful you should have some knowledge of sheep. Another way to get in the game is to work with some sheep outfit for a couple of years and then get sheep to run on shares. This was a fairly easy matter several years ago but not so easy these days. Colorado is not nearly as much a sheep State as Wyoming and you would have a better chance of getting work and eventually getting sheep on shares in Wyoming.

I think you might do fairly well with a small capital raising Angora goats. Write to Division of Publications, Dept. of Agriculture, Washington, D. C. and request them to send you *Farmers' Bulletin 1203*. It is free. You can find plenty of good homestead land in Colorado and I believe you would do much better with goats if you have only a small capital.

I think you would like Colorado and you would have no difficulty obtaining employment there. I would suggest that if you intend to try the sheep game that you work at least a year with sheep. You can probably get work in April at Casper, Wyoming. You have to learn about sheep just the same as you do about engineering. Write to Dept. of the Interior, General Land Office, Washington, D. C. and ask for circular *No. 302, Soldiers' and Sailors' Homestead* rights which gives you all information regarding the above.

Speedsters

THE making of a star of the automobile racetracks is by no means as simple or fortuitous a process as the movies lead people to believe.

Request:—"Over a year ago I wrote to you asking how to make a start in auto racing. You sent the letter to a man in Philadelphia, whose name, I believe, is Neil. I have profited very much by the information Mr. Neil sent me.

I own a Dodge Special that I entered in a couple of races in central Pennsylvania this fall before coming up here, and am writing you for a little more information. Is there any racing association that runs a circuit; that is, that has their races planned ahead of time, so that if I wanted to follow racing in the East all summer, I would know just whom to apply to. Will you please send me the addresses of them?"—JACK WHITE, Toronto, Ont., Canada.

Reply, by Mr. Edmund B. Neil:—There are several racing associations throughout the country, which during the summer months operate on a prearranged schedule at the various race tracks in their localities. One of the most prominent of these is the International Motor Contest Association, of which a Mr. Alexander Sloan is in active charge. I do not have Mr. Sloan's address, but believe that you can reach the headquarters of this Association by addressing a letter to it at Des Moines, Iowa; Mr. Corey, Secretary. Of course, the best known group in this country is the American Automobile Association, whose headquarters are in Washington, D. C. By addressing the Contest Board of this Association you may secure a list of sanctioned races scheduled for several months in advance of the time they are to be held. You might write Mr. Andrew Bert, Chicago representative, American Automobile Association, S. Michigan Ave., Chicago. Mr. Bert is promoter for the AAA's in the Chicago territory.

The one sure way that I know of to obtain a standing as a race driver which will warrant consideration for the big races such as the annual one at Indianapolis, is to start out with a fast car on local dirt tracks, thus obtaining experience under severe conditions. With this experience as a background, and enough money to purchase a fast car such as a Miller or Duesenberg, or have a special job built up by one of the three or four shops specializing in race car assembly, (there is one here in Philadelphia), it is then possible to race on the board tracks where speeds in excess of 125 miles per

hour must be attained to have any chance of winning. Following this may come a chance to tackle Indianapolis, if success "on the dirt" or "on the boards" has resulted in recognition as a winning driver. Practically all of the race drivers known today have developed themselves in the manner outlined above, including Mr. Keech and the two men who just lost their lives in the sinking of the Vestris, Messrs. Batten and Devore. I might mention also that Mr. E. V. Rickenbacker, present Chairman of the Contest Board of the AAA, raced cars on dirt tracks during the early days of the industry.

I believe that in my former letter I mentioned the National Motor Racing Association (N.M.R.A.), of which Mr. Leo Cornell, 55th & Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia, is Secretary. Mr. Cornell also builds racing cars for the use of drivers belonging to his association, and has recently been operating under AAA, or official sanctions, rather than acting independently as has been the case in the past.

Antarctic

A REGION to attract no one but a solitary, or a man with a malignant case of mother-in-law-itis.

Request:—"Will you kindly give me some information as to the following questions:

1. Is there any big game hunting in the Antarctic regions—Palmer Land, for instance?

2. Is there anything there to attract the sportsman?

3. Is this region visited often by vessels, especially whalers?

4. Is there any lumbering industry carried on Tierra Del Fuego or adjacent territories; if not what are the prospects?

5. Please give some facts concerning the population of the above mentioned (No. 4) region."

—R. A. ELLIOTT, Palacios, Texas.

Reply, by Capt. A. E. Dingle:—First apologising for delay in answering your query, consequent upon my being wrecked in the recent September hurricane in the Bahamas, I'll try to give you such data as you ask:

1. There is no land life whatever in the Antarctic regions. There are birds, and seals, and whales, but nothing that walks or runs bigger than a wingless insect. Unless you think shooting skuas or penguins worthy a sportsman's time, there is nothing to warrant the trouble of getting there.

2. On South Georgia there is, or was recently, a whaling station of small extent, and perhaps two whalers a year frequent the regions. Steam whalers now.

3. Tierra del Fuego has little timber big enough for commercial exploitation. You have to get up into the mainland to find trees of any size.

The population of Tierra del Fuego is almost entirely native—Onas and Yaghans—but there are, or were, a few sheep breeders, mainly Scottish. It is a bleak region, with little or nothing to attract anybody but a hermit or a poor devil with a nagging wife or proprietary mother-in-law.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.

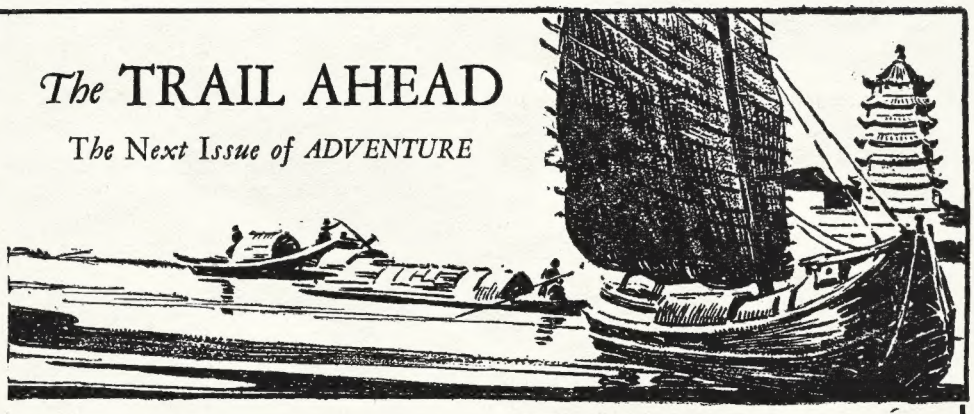
3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

The list of experts, omitted in this issue, will reappear in the March 1st issue.

The TRAIL AHEAD

The Next Issue of ADVENTURE



The RED LAMP

By CHARLES GILSON

An absorbing complete novel of mystery and adventure in the Malay Archipelago

IN OLD NARADA FORT

A Novelette of Modern India

By TALBOT MUNDY

And—Other Good Stories

OFF FINISTERRE, a story of shipwreck on forlorn seas, by ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN; BUCKING BUCK BRADY, a story of the whittling sheriff of Mojave Wells, by W. C. TUTTLE; MORALE, a story of the Royal Flying Corps, by BEN RAY REDMAN; SQUARE, a story of the prize ring, by MAX WILKINSON; STUNT NIGHT, a humorous tale of the A. E. F., by JAMES STEVENS; GUNSTORE WISE ONES, what makes a gunman expert, by RAYMOND S. SPEARS; PAYMENT IN FULL, a story of a Western "wild bunch," by FOSTER-HARRIS; BROKEN SEALS, a story of railroad plunderers in the Missouri Hills, by E. S. DELLINGER; and concluding DUST AND SUN, CLEMENTS RIPLEY's great novel of Latin America

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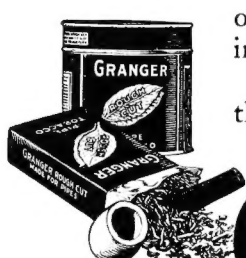
A cool sweet smoke — and the pipe stays clean!

Smokers tell us that after its rich, cool flavor, the thing they like best about Granger Rough Cut is the way it burns, slowly and completely, to a clean *dry* ash. No soggy "heel" of half-burned tobacco oils; their pipes are cleaner, they say — cleaner, sweeter, and cooler — than they ever were before!

"A cooler smoke in a drier pipe"—thanks to our secret Wellman Method and the slow-burning Rough Cut.

Packed in foil (instead of costly tin), hence the price—ten cents.



Granger
ROUGH CUT

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In the triple-sealed yellow package —not touched by hand
LUDEN'S Menthol COUGH DROPS
NOT TOUCHED BY HAND
NET WEIGHT 1¾ OZ.
LUDEN'S NAME ON EVERY DROP
LUDEN'S 5¢ GIVE QUICK RELIEF
5¢